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The Evolution of Asymmetric Warfare in Indonesian Counterterrorism: A Conceptual Analysis, 2002–2024

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Abstract

Although terrorism and counterterrorism in Indonesia have received substantial scholarly attention, limited research has examined the evolution of the country's asymmetric warfare strategy from predominantly military and law-enforcement-oriented responses toward a multidimensional counterterrorism framework. This study aims to analyze the evolution of Indonesia's asymmetric warfare strategy in counterterrorism from 2002 to 2024, identify the strategic factors underlying this transformation, and assess its implications for Indonesian defense doctrine. A qualitative approach was employed through conceptual analysis, literature review, and documentary analysis. Data were derived from academic literature, institutional reports, specialized terrorism studies, and official Indonesian legal and policy documents and were analyzed through documentary mapping, periodization, thematic analysis, theoretical interpretation, and source triangulation. The analytical framework incorporated perspectives on asymmetric warfare, strategic adaptation, terrorist organizational decline, whole-of-government coordination, and civil-military relations. The findings identify four broad phases of strategic development: a predominantly law-enforcement-oriented phase from 2002 to 2009, an institutional expansion phase from 2010 to 2015, a reconfiguration of military and law-enforcement roles from 2016 to 2018, and the consolidation of a multidimensional framework from 2019 to 2024. This evolution was associated with changes in terrorist organizational structures, operational environments, and mobilization patterns, alongside the expansion of prevention, deradicalization, community engagement, and interagency coordination. The findings demonstrate that Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy evolved through the progressive

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integration of coercive, preventive, institutional, and social instruments rather than through the complete replacement of military or law-enforcement approaches. This study contributes to the literature on asymmetric warfare and strategic adaptation by illustrating how counterterrorism frameworks can develop in response to changing threat characteristics and institutional demands. It also highlights the relevance of multidimensional coordination for the development of Indonesian defense and security policy, while underscoring the need for further empirical research on the effectiveness of individual components of this framework across organizations, regions, and periods.

Keywords: Asymmetric Warfare; Counterterrorism; Indonesia; Multidimensional Counterterrorism; Strategic Adaptation

INTRODUCTION

Modern terrorism presents strategic challenges that differ fundamentally from conventional warfare. Rather than confronting states through symmetrical military engagements, terrorist organizations exploit political, institutional, social, and technological vulnerabilities while avoiding direct confrontation with superior state forces (Indrawan & Supriyadi, 2025). In asymmetric conflict, the weaker actor can offset material disadvantages by sustaining political commitment, exploiting vulnerabilities, and imposing disproportionate strategic costs on the stronger actor (Hidayatika & Widodo, 2026). From this perspective, terrorism can be examined not only as a criminal or security threat but also as a form of asymmetric conflict that requires a comprehensive strategic response (Haripin et al., 2024).

Indonesia experienced the strategic consequences of terrorism most prominently following the Bali bombings on 12 October 2002, which killed 202 people. The attacks prompted the Indonesian government to establish an immediate legal and institutional framework for counterterrorism through Government Regulation in Lieu of Law Number 1 of 2002, subsequently enacted by the House of Representatives (DPR) as Law Number 15 of 2003 (Haripin et al., 2020). The post-2002 period therefore represents an important starting point for examining the development of Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy (Rucktäschel & Schuck, 2019). Over the subsequent two decades, the nature of the terrorist threat also changed, ranging from hierarchical organizational networks such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), to armed groups such as Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) in Poso, and increasingly decentralized cells and individuals influenced by online radicalization associated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Anindya, 2024).

The changing character of terrorism has required corresponding adjustments in state responses. Agastia et al. (2020) argues that the changing nature of terrorist organizations requires states to continuously adapt their counterterrorism strategies. In Indonesia, this adaptation can be observed in the gradual expansion of counterterrorism beyond armed enforcement to include intelligence cooperation, preventive measures, deradicalization, counter-radicalization, counter-narratives, community engagement, and other non-military instruments (Gayatri & True, 2025). These developments suggest a broader transformation in how the state conceptualizes and responds to asymmetric terrorist threats (Zulfa et al., 2025).

Despite the development of Indonesia's counterterrorism framework, existing scholarship has predominantly examined terrorism through legal, criminal justice, security, or human rights perspectives. Comparatively less attention has been given to understanding the evolution of Indonesian counterterrorism as a transformation in asymmetric warfare strategy and its implications for defense doctrine. This perspective is important because changes in terrorist organization, recruitment mechanisms, communication technologies, and operational patterns can alter the strategic requirements of the state. Examining these developments through a defense-strategic perspective may therefore provide a different understanding of how Indonesia has adapted its response to asymmetric threats.

Accordingly, this study examines the evolution of asymmetric warfare strategy in Indonesian counterterrorism between 2002 and 2024. It addresses two research questions: (1) How did Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy evolve from predominantly military-oriented responses toward a multidimensional approach between 2002 and 2024? and (2) What strategic factors contributed to this evolution, and what implications does it have for Indonesia's defense doctrine? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to conceptualize the transformation of Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy in response to the changing character of asymmetric threats and to identify its broader implications for contemporary defense strategy.

Theoretical Framework

Asymmetric Warfare and Strategic Interaction

Asymmetric warfare refers to conflicts in which opposing actors possess substantial differences in material capabilities, organizational resources, and conventional military power. Rather than engaging the stronger actor on its preferred terms, the weaker actor seeks

to exploit vulnerabilities and alter the conditions of strategic interaction. Arreguín-Toft's strategic interaction theory explains this dynamic by distinguishing between direct and indirect approaches. Strong actors tend to rely on direct approaches that seek to exploit their superior material capabilities, whereas weak actors can improve their strategic position by adopting indirect approaches that avoid the stronger actor's advantages (M. Price, 2022).

This framework is particularly relevant to counterterrorism because terrorist organizations generally lack the conventional capabilities required for symmetrical confrontation with the state. Instead, they can exploit vulnerable targets, decentralized organizational structures, clandestine networks, information environments, and public perceptions to impose political and strategic costs on the state. The asymmetric character of terrorism therefore requires states to adapt their strategies rather than relying exclusively on conventional coercive capabilities (Oak, 2010).

Strategic adaptation is further explained by Kilcullen's concept of the *accidental guerrilla*. Kilcullen argues that military intervention can unintentionally generate local resistance when affected populations perceive state forces as a source of threat or disruption. Although developed primarily in the context of irregular warfare, this perspective is relevant to counterterrorism because it highlights the importance of political legitimacy and societal support. Military force may weaken terrorist organizations operationally, but excessive or poorly calibrated coercion can create conditions that facilitate recruitment, mobilization, or sympathy for extremist actors (2007).

Taken together, Arreguín-Toft and Kilcullen provide the foundation for understanding why counterterrorism cannot be evaluated solely in terms of the state's coercive capacity. The effectiveness of a counterterrorism strategy also depends on whether the state can adapt its instruments to the changing behavior of asymmetric actors while maintaining political and social legitimacy.

Terrorist Organizational Decline and Strategic Adaptation

Understanding the evolution of counterterrorism strategy also requires consideration of how terrorist organizations decline, transform, or terminate. Cronin identifies several pathways through which terrorist campaigns can end, including leadership decapitation, negotiation, achievement of strategic objectives, loss of public support, repression, and transformation into other forms of political or violent activity.[3] This framework provides an analytical basis for examining whether counterterrorism operations produce the destruction

of terrorist organizations, their organizational fragmentation, or their transformation into new forms of violent activity (Smith, 2005).

This perspective is particularly relevant to Indonesia because the terrorist threat has not remained organizationally static. The state has confronted different configurations of terrorist actors, ranging from hierarchical organizations and armed groups to smaller cells and individuals influenced by transnational extremist movements and online radicalization. Consequently, the strategic response cannot be assessed solely according to whether a particular organization has been disrupted or its leaders eliminated. It must also consider whether the broader ecosystem supporting recruitment, mobilization, financing, radicalization, and ideological dissemination has changed (Hwang, 2019).

Crenshaw's work complements this perspective by emphasizing that terrorism emerges from the interaction between broader structural conditions and the strategic calculations of terrorist organizations. Counterterrorism strategies therefore need to address both the operational capabilities of terrorist groups and the conditions that enable their persistence. This provides a conceptual basis for examining the expansion of Indonesian counterterrorism from primarily coercive measures toward preventive, social, ideological, and institutional instruments.

Whole-of-Government Approach and Multidimensional Counterterrorism

The transition toward a multidimensional counterterrorism strategy can be conceptualized through the *whole-of-government* approach. Christensen and Lægreid define whole-of-government governance as an effort to coordinate activities across governmental institutions and administrative levels in order to address complex problems that cannot be effectively managed by a single institution.

Terrorism represents such a problem because its causes, organizational structures, and operational consequences extend across multiple domains. Counterterrorism may therefore require simultaneous action in intelligence, law enforcement, military affairs, border security, financial regulation, education, social policy, communications, and community engagement. Within this framework, a multidimensional counterterrorism strategy does not necessarily imply the abandonment of military force. Rather, military capabilities become one component within a broader system of mutually reinforcing instruments.

This distinction is important for understanding Indonesia's strategic evolution. The emergence of a multidimensional approach should therefore not be interpreted as a simple

replacement of military instruments by civilian instruments. Instead, it represents a change in the configuration and relative role of different state instruments. Coercive measures may remain necessary for disrupting terrorist organizations, while preventive and societal measures address radicalization, recruitment, ideological dissemination, and reintegration.

Civil-Military Relations and the Role of the TNI

The changing role of the military in counterterrorism must also be examined within the framework of civil-military relations. Feaver conceptualizes civil-military relations through a principal-agent framework in which civilian authorities establish mechanisms of monitoring and control to ensure that military organizations operate within their authorized political mandates. This perspective is relevant to Indonesia because the expansion of counterterrorism responsibilities raises questions concerning the appropriate role, authority, and oversight of the military in domestic security (King et al., 2011).

Haripin's analysis of Indonesian civil-military relations further demonstrates that Military Operations Other Than War (Operasi Militer Selain Perang/OMSP) have created institutional space for the TNI to participate in non-conventional security affairs while simultaneously generating questions regarding political authority and civilian oversight.[7] The role of the TNI in counterterrorism should therefore be examined not simply in terms of whether military force is used, but in terms of how military involvement is institutionally positioned within a broader counterterrorism architecture (Haripin et al., 2020).

Accordingly, the evolution toward a multidimensional approach does not necessarily eliminate the military dimension. Instead, it potentially changes the military's position from being the dominant instrument of response to becoming one element within an integrated national counterterrorism framework. This conceptualization allows the study to examine the changing relationship between military capabilities, civilian institutions, intelligence agencies, law enforcement, and societal actors (Haripin et al., 2024).

Analytical Framework

Based on the preceding theoretical perspectives, this study conceptualizes the evolution of Indonesian counterterrorism as a process of strategic adaptation to changes in the character of asymmetric threats. Arreguín-Toft's strategic interaction theory explains the strategic logic underlying asymmetric conflict; Kilcullen highlights the importance of legitimacy and the unintended consequences of excessive coercion; Cronin provides a

framework for examining terrorist organizational decline and transformation; Christensen and Lægreid explain the institutional logic of interagency coordination; while Feaver and Haripin provide a framework for examining the changing role and oversight of military institutions.

These perspectives are integrated into three analytical dimensions: (1) the changing character of the terrorist threat, (2) the changing composition of state responses, and (3) the changing institutional role of military and civilian actors. Through these dimensions, the study examines whether and how Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy evolved between 2002 and 2024 from a predominantly military- and enforcement-oriented response toward a more multidimensional strategic approach.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a conceptual analysis design supported by a literature review and documentary analysis (Aprila & Dwiharyadi, 2026). The purpose of the study is not to statistically test relationships between variables but to examine how Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy evolved in response to changes in the character of terrorist threats between 2002 and 2024. The analysis focuses on the transformation of strategic responses, particularly the changing balance between military and law-enforcement measures and broader preventive, institutional, social, ideological, and technological instruments.

The qualitative design is appropriate because the evolution of counterterrorism strategy involves changes in policies, institutions, operational practices, threat perceptions, and strategic doctrines that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative indicators alone. The study therefore interprets textual and documentary evidence to identify patterns of continuity, change, and strategic adaptation over the observation period.

The temporal scope of 2002–2024 is selected because 2002 represents a major turning point in Indonesia's contemporary counterterrorism policy following the Bali bombings, while 2024 provides the endpoint for examining two decades of subsequent strategic and institutional development. The period is analyzed as a process of strategic evolution rather than as a simple chronological description of terrorist incidents.

Data Sources and Source Selection

The study relies exclusively on secondary data obtained from academic, institutional, and official documentary sources. The sources are organized into four categories.

First, the study examines academic books and scholarly monographs addressing asymmetric warfare, terrorism, counterterrorism, radicalization, terrorist organizations, and civil-military relations. Key theoretical and empirical works include publications by Arreguín-Toft, Kilcullen, Cronin, Crenshaw, Gunaratna, Solahudin, and Hwang. These sources are used to establish the conceptual foundations of asymmetric conflict and to interpret changes in terrorist organizational structures and state responses.

Second, the study examines reports produced by established research institutions and policy-oriented organizations, particularly the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) and the International Crisis Group. These reports are used to provide contextual and empirical information concerning terrorist organizations, recruitment patterns, radicalization, organizational fragmentation, ISIS influence, and developments in Indonesian counterterrorism. Institutional reports are treated as supporting evidence and are cross-checked against other sources rather than being used as the sole basis for major conclusions.

Third, the study reviews scholarly journal articles addressing terrorism, asymmetric warfare, security studies, counterterrorism, strategic studies, and civil-military relations. Priority is given to peer-reviewed publications and established academic journals, including *Terrorism and Political Violence* and *International Security*, as well as specialized security publications such as *CTC Sentinel*. Journal literature is used both to identify established theoretical arguments and to compare the Indonesian experience with broader developments in counterterrorism research.

Fourth, the study analyzes official Indonesian state documents, including legislation, presidential regulations, government regulations, BNPT publications, and other relevant policy documents. These sources are particularly important for identifying formal changes in Indonesia's counterterrorism framework, institutional responsibilities, and the legal basis for military and civilian involvement. Official documents are analyzed as primary documentary evidence of state policy and institutional arrangements (Sugiyono, 2024).

Sources were selected based on four criteria: relevance to Indonesian counterterrorism and asymmetric warfare, publication or institutional credibility, substantive relevance to the 2002–2024 observation period, and usefulness for explaining changes in

strategy, institutions, or terrorist threat characteristics. Sources that only provide general descriptions of terrorism without contributing to the study's analytical framework are used selectively and are not treated as core evidence.

Unit of Analysis and Analytical Focus

The primary unit of analysis is the counterterrorism strategy of the Indonesian state between 2002 and 2024. The study does not treat individual terrorist incidents as independent cases. Instead, terrorist incidents, organizational developments, policy changes, and institutional developments are examined as evidence of broader strategic transformation.

The analysis is organized around three dimensions. The first dimension concerns the changing character of the terrorist threat, including organizational structure, operational patterns, recruitment mechanisms, ideological influence, and the increasing use of digital communication. The second dimension concerns the composition of state responses, including military operations, law enforcement, intelligence activities, prevention, deradicalization, counter-radicalization, counter-narratives, community engagement, and other non-coercive instruments. The third dimension concerns the institutional configuration of counterterrorism, particularly coordination among the TNI, Polri, intelligence institutions, BNPT, ministries, and relevant civil-society actors.

These three dimensions allow the study to examine whether changes in the terrorist threat were accompanied by corresponding changes in the instruments and institutional structure of Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy.

Periodization of the Analysis

The evolution of Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy is analyzed through historical periodization. Rather than assigning periods solely according to calendar years, the study identifies periods based on major changes in terrorist threat characteristics, significant terrorist incidents, institutional developments, and changes in counterterrorism policy.

The periodization serves two purposes. First, it establishes a chronological structure for tracing strategic change over time. Second, it allows the study to identify whether changes in state strategy corresponded to changes in the behavior and organizational characteristics of terrorist actors.

Each period is therefore examined through four analytical questions: (1) what type of asymmetric threat was most prominent; (2) what strategic instruments were predominantly employed by the state; (3) how were military and civilian institutions positioned within the counterterrorism framework; and (4) what strategic limitations or emerging challenges encouraged subsequent adaptation?

The resulting periodization is used as an analytical device rather than as an assumption that Indonesia experienced discrete and completely separate strategic phases. Continuities between periods are retained where policies, institutions, or operational practices persisted across subsequent phases.

Analytical Procedure

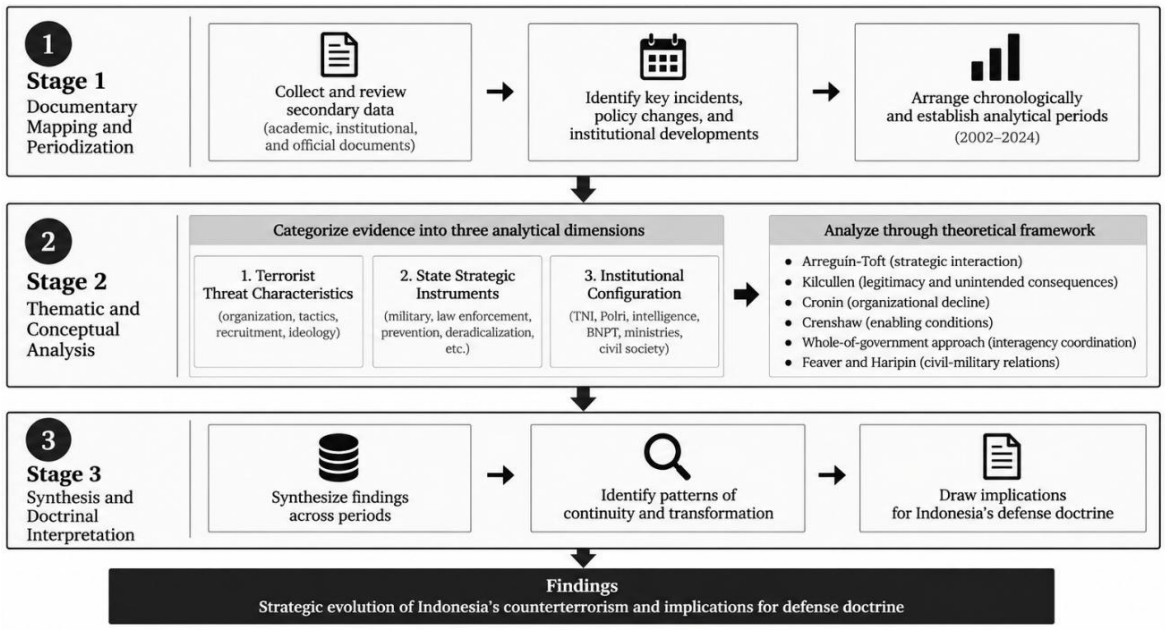


Figure 1. Analytical Procedure

Figure 1 illustrates the analytical procedure employed to examine the evolution of Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy between 2002 and 2024. The analytical process consists of three sequential stages. In Stage 1, *Documentary Mapping and Periodization*, the study collects and reviews secondary data from academic literature, institutional reports, and official government documents. These sources are then used to identify major terrorist incidents, policy changes, and institutional developments, which are arranged chronologically to establish the analytical periods covering 2002–2024.

In Stage 2, *Thematic and Conceptual Analysis*, the evidence identified in the first stage is categorized into three analytical dimensions: (1) terrorist threat characteristics, including organizational structures, tactics, recruitment patterns, and ideological developments; (2) state strategic instruments, including military operations, law enforcement, intelligence, prevention, deradicalization, and other counterterrorism measures; and (3) institutional configuration, including the roles and coordination of the TNI, Polri, intelligence institutions, BNPT, government ministries, and civil society. The categorized evidence is subsequently interpreted using the theoretical frameworks established in this study, particularly strategic interaction, the unintended consequences of coercive intervention, terrorist organizational decline, the whole-of-government approach, and civil-military relations.

In Stage 3, *Synthesis and Doctrinal Interpretation*, the findings from each analytical period are synthesized to identify patterns of continuity and strategic transformation. The analysis then examines how changes in terrorist threats and state responses contributed to the broader transformation of Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy and considers the implications of this transformation for Indonesia's defense doctrine. As shown in Figure 1, the analytical procedure therefore moves systematically from documentary evidence and historical periodization, through theoretical and thematic interpretation, toward a synthesis of strategic evolution and its doctrinal implications.

Interpretation of Strategic Evolution

The central analytical distinction of this study is between a predominantly military- and enforcement-oriented approach and a multidimensional counterterrorism approach. The former refers to strategies in which coercive instruments, including military and law-enforcement operations, constitute the principal mechanisms for disrupting terrorist organizations. The latter refers to an integrated approach in which coercive measures operate alongside intelligence, prevention, deradicalization, counter-radicalization, counter-narratives, community engagement, institutional coordination, and other relevant instruments.

The study does not assume that the emergence of a multidimensional approach represents the complete replacement of military capabilities. Instead, strategic evolution is understood as a change in the configuration, coordination, and relative role of different instruments used by the state. Military capabilities may remain relevant within a

multidimensional framework while their function, institutional position, and relationship with civilian agencies change.

On this basis, the study evaluates the evolution of Indonesian counterterrorism according to three indicators of strategic transformation: (1) diversification of strategic instruments, (2) increasing institutional integration and interagency coordination, and (3) adaptation of state responses to changes in terrorist organizational and operational characteristics. The final analysis connects these patterns to broader questions concerning Indonesia's defense doctrine and the appropriate role of military power in responding to contemporary asymmetric threats.

RESULTS

Evolution of Indonesia's Counterterrorism Strategy, 2002–2024

The analysis of documentary and secondary sources identifies four broad phases in the development of Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy between 2002 and 2024. The phases are distinguished according to changes in the characteristics of terrorist threats, major counterterrorism operations, institutional developments, and changes in the legal and policy framework. The periodization is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Periodization of Indonesia's Counterterrorism Strategy, 2002–2024

Period	Dominant Threat Characteristics	Main State Response	Major Institutional/Policy Development	Strategic Orientation
2002–2009	Hierarchical JI network; established organizational and training structures	Intelligence, investigation, arrest, and prosecution	Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 1/2002; Law No. 15/2003; establishment of Densus 88	Law-enforcement-oriented
2010–2015	Armed networks, MIT in Poso, and emergence of ISIS influence	Law enforcement combined with expanding prevention and institutional coordination	Establishment of BNPT through Presidential Regulation No. 46/2010 and amendment through Presidential Regulation No. 12/2012	Institutional expansion
2016–2018	ISIS-linked networks, urban attacks, and armed insurgency in Poso	Police-led enforcement, joint operations, and increased military participation	Operation Tinombala; Law No. 5/2018	Military–law enforcement reconfiguration
2019–2024	Decentralized networks, individual/family	Enforcement, prevention, deradicalization,	RAN PE through Presidential Regulation No. 7/2021; Operation	Multidimensional consolidation

Period	Dominant Threat Characteristics	Main State Response	Major Institutional/Policy Development	Strategic Orientation
	mobilization, online radicalization, and residual armed groups	counter-radicalization, community engagement, and interagency coordination	Madago Raya; JI dissolution in 2024	

Source: Government of Indonesia, Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 1/2002; Law No. 15/2003; Law No. 34/2004; Presidential Regulation No. 46/2010; Presidential Regulation No. 12/2012; Law No. 5/2018; Presidential Regulation No. 7/2021; and relevant literature on Indonesian counterterrorism strategy.

Table 1 shows that Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy did not develop through a complete replacement of one instrument by another. Instead, the composition of the strategy expanded over time. The initial period was dominated by police-led law enforcement and intelligence-based disruption. From 2010 onward, institutional responsibilities expanded through the establishment of BNPT, while the changing threat environment introduced new operational requirements. Between 2016 and 2018, military capabilities became more visible in operations against armed terrorist groups in Poso. From 2019 onward, preventive, societal, and interagency components became increasingly institutionalized alongside continued enforcement activities.

Phase I: Law-Enforcement-Oriented Counterterrorism, 2002–2009

The first phase began with the Bali bombings on 12 October 2002. The attacks prompted the Indonesian government to establish an immediate legal framework through Government Regulation in Lieu of Law Number 1 of 2002, subsequently enacted as Law Number 15 of 2003. Counterterrorism during this period was primarily organized around law enforcement, intelligence, investigation, arrest, and prosecution.

Densus 88 Anti-Terror was established in 2003 and developed into the principal operational instrument for counterterrorism enforcement. The government also established the Counterterrorism Coordination Desk under the Coordinating Ministry for Political and Security Affairs to facilitate coordination among relevant institutions. However, coordination during this period remained primarily administrative.

The terrorist threat during this phase was strongly associated with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). International Crisis Group described JI as a hierarchical organization with territorial

divisions and an established regional training network. This organizational structure provided law-enforcement authorities with identifiable organizational targets. The deaths of Azahari Husin in 2005 and Noordin M. Top in 2009 were followed by a substantial disruption of JI's operational capabilities.

The legal position of the military also developed during this period. Law Number 34 of 2004 on the Indonesian National Armed Forces placed counterterrorism within the framework of Military Operations Other Than War (OMSP), subject to the relevant political decision-making process. Nevertheless, the principal operational response between 2002 and 2009 remained centered on police and law-enforcement institutions.

Preventive and rehabilitation measures were less developed during this phase. Reports on Indonesian prisons identified correctional facilities as environments where extremist ideology could continue to circulate and facilitate recruitment. This indicates that the early counterterrorism framework was more strongly oriented toward disrupting existing terrorist networks than addressing longer-term processes of radicalization and disengagement.

Phase II: Institutional Expansion and Emerging Interagency Coordination, 2010–2015

The discovery of an armed training camp in Jalin Jantho, Aceh Besar, in early 2010 represented an important development in the threat environment. The camp demonstrated the ability of terrorist networks to maintain organizational and operational capabilities despite extensive counterterrorism operations during the preceding period.

The government subsequently established the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) through Presidential Regulation Number 46 of 2010, later amended by Presidential Regulation Number 12 of 2012. BNPT was assigned responsibilities covering prevention, protection, deradicalization, and coordination. Its establishment expanded the institutional architecture of counterterrorism beyond the operational activities of law-enforcement and intelligence institutions.

At the operational level, Densus 88 continued to conduct enforcement operations. At the same time, the emergence of Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) in Poso introduced a different form of threat. MIT operated in a geographically difficult environment and exploited the legacy of communal conflict and local grievances. The Poso environment consequently presented characteristics that differed from the predominantly urban and network-based terrorist activities encountered during the early post-Bali period.

The declaration of ISIS in 2014 further changed the threat environment. Several Indonesian groups, including MIT, pledged allegiance to ISIS, while the organization encouraged Indonesian supporters to travel to Syria. The development contributed to the emergence of more fluid and transnationally connected forms of terrorist mobilization.

The main developments during this period are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Changes in Threat Characteristics and Counterterrorism Responses

Analytical Dimension	2002–2009	2010–2015	2016–2018	2019–2024
Predominant threat	Hierarchical JI network	Armed networks and emerging ISIS influence	ISIS-linked networks and MIT insurgency	Decentralized networks, individual/family mobilization, and online radicalization
Organizational pattern	Relatively hierarchical	Networked and geographically dispersed	Mixed: urban cells and armed groups	Increasingly decentralized and fluid
Main operational environment	Predominantly urban and network-based	Urban and rural	Urban attacks and rural Poso operations	Physical and digital environments
Dominant state instrument	Law enforcement and intelligence	Law enforcement with institutional expansion	Joint security operations and expanded military participation	Integrated enforcement, prevention, deradicalization, and community-based measures
Prevention orientation	Limited	Emerging	Expanding	Increasingly institutionalized
Institutional coordination	Limited/administrative	Expanded through BNPT	Joint operational coordination	Broader interagency coordination
Civil society involvement	Limited	Emerging	Increasing	More visible in prevention and reintegration

Source: Arreguín-Toft (2001); Crenshaw (1981); Gunaratna (2002, 2010); Kilcullen (2009); Cronin (2009); Solahudin (2013); BNPT (2016, 2021); Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC); International Crisis Group (ICG); Government of Indonesia, Law No. 15/2003, Law No. 5/2018, and Presidential Regulation No. 7/2021.

The comparison in Table 2 indicates that changes in Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy occurred alongside changes in the characteristics of terrorist threats. The threat evolved from relatively structured organizations toward more diverse forms of mobilization involving armed groups, transnational ideological affiliation, decentralized cells, and

individual or family-based attacks. Correspondingly, state responses expanded from predominantly enforcement-based instruments toward a broader combination of coercive and non-coercive measures.

Phase III: Reconfiguration of Military and Law-Enforcement Roles, 2016–2018

The third phase was characterized by a more visible role for joint military and law-enforcement operations. The January 2016 attack in the Jalan M.H. Thamrin area of Jakarta demonstrated the operational capacity of pro-ISIS networks to conduct attacks in the capital. During the same period, security forces conducted Operation Tinombala in Poso to pursue MIT, following Operation Camar Maleo.

Although Polri retained operational command, the operation involved TNI personnel and military capabilities. The operational environment in Poso required capabilities associated with operations in difficult terrain, including jungle operations, reconnaissance, and territorial activities. In July 2016, Santoso, the leader of MIT, was killed during a security operation. MIT nevertheless continued to operate under Ali Kalora for several years.

The May 2018 terrorist-prison riot at the Mobile Brigade Headquarters in Kelapa Dua and the Surabaya bombings further demonstrated changes in terrorist tactics and mobilization. The Surabaya attacks involved members of a single family, including women and children, and illustrated a different form of terrorist mobilization from the hierarchical organizational model associated with the early JI period.

The legal framework was subsequently strengthened through Law Number 5 of 2018, which amended Law Number 15 of 2003. The amendment expanded preventive enforcement powers, explicitly recognized the role of the TNI in countering terrorism within the OMSP framework, and strengthened the legal basis for national preparedness, counter-radicalization, and deradicalization. The principal institutional and legal developments of the four phases are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Major Institutional and Legal Developments, 2002–2024

Year	Development	Institutional/Legal Significance
2002	Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 1/2002	Established an immediate legal basis for counterterrorism following the Bali bombings
2003	Law No. 15/2003	Enacted the terrorism regulation into law
2003	Establishment of Densus 88	Strengthened specialized police counterterrorism capability

Year	Development	Institutional/Legal Significance
2004	Law No. 34/2004	Established the legal framework for TNI involvement through OMSP
2010	Presidential Regulation No. 46/2010	Established BNPT and expanded institutional counterterrorism functions
2012	Presidential Regulation No. 12/2012	Amended the regulatory framework governing BNPT
2016	Operation Tinombala	Expanded joint military–police operational involvement in Poso
2018	Law No. 5/2018	Strengthened preventive measures, deradicalization, and the legal role of TNI
2021	Presidential Regulation No. 7/2021	Institutionalized RAN PE and expanded cross-government and civil-society participation
2021	Operation Madago Raya	Continued integrated security operations against MIT
2024	JI dissolution announcement	Marked a major organizational transformation of JI

Source: Government of Indonesia, Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 1/2002; Law No. 15/2003; Law No. 34/2004; Presidential Regulation No. 46/2010; Presidential Regulation No. 12/2012; Law No. 5/2018; Presidential Regulation No. 7/2021; and official reports/documents concerning Operation Tinombala, Operation Madago Raya, and the 2024 dissolution of Jemaah Islamiyah.

The developments in Table 3 demonstrate that institutional transformation occurred incrementally rather than through a single policy change. The initial legal framework was followed by the development of specialized police capabilities, formal recognition of the military's potential role, the creation of BNPT, and subsequently broader preventive and interagency mechanisms.

Phase IV: Consolidation of a Multidimensional Counterterrorism Framework, 2019–2024

The fourth phase was characterized by the increasing institutionalization of preventive, societal, and interagency components of counterterrorism. Enforcement operations continued, but they were increasingly accompanied by measures addressing violent extremism, radicalization, reintegration, and community participation.

A major policy development was Presidential Regulation Number 7 of 2021 concerning the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism that Leads to Terrorism (RAN PE) for 2020–2024. The framework involved multiple ministries and government agencies and provided space for cooperation with civil-society organizations. The policy broadened the scope of counterterrorism toward prevention and the factors associated with violent extremism.

Security operations also continued during this phase. Operation Madago Raya succeeded Operation Tinombala in Poso. Ali Kalora, who had succeeded Santoso as the leader of MIT, was killed in September 2021. Operations in Poso during this period incorporated security operations alongside territorial engagement, community interaction, and efforts to disrupt logistical networks.

The role of civil society and social reintegration also became increasingly visible. Sumpter identified the contribution of Indonesian civil-society organizations to prevention and reintegration programs. Hwang's research on former Indonesian jihadists further identified disillusionment with terrorist organizations, changes in social relationships, and practical support as factors associated with disengagement.

A major organizational development occurred on 30 June 2024, when senior JI figures announced the dissolution of the organization and their return to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. This represented a substantial organizational change after more than two decades of JI-related activity. However, the dissolution did not necessarily eliminate all potential terrorist risks because individuals or splinter groups rejecting the decision could remain active. The principal characteristics of the multidimensional framework are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Components of the Emerging Multidimensional Counterterrorism Approach

Component	Principal Actors	Main Function	Evidence of Development
Law enforcement	Polri/Densus 88	Investigation, arrest, disruption, and prosecution	Continued throughout 2002–2024
Intelligence	Intelligence institutions	Threat identification, monitoring, and operational support	Increasingly integrated with counterterrorism operations
Military capability	TNI	Support for operations requiring military capabilities	More visible in Poso operations and formally recognized within OMSP
Prevention	BNPT and government agencies	Preventing radicalization and violent extremism	Expanded through BNPT and RAN PE
Deradicalization and disengagement	BNPT, correctional institutions, civil society	Supporting behavioral change and reintegration	Increasingly developed after the establishment of BNPT
Community engagement	Government and civil society	Building social resilience and supporting reintegration	More visible during the later period

Component	Principal Actors	Main Function	Evidence of Development
Counter-narrative measures	Government and relevant social actors	Addressing extremist ideological dissemination	Expanded alongside the changing information environment
Interagency coordination	BNPT, Polri, TNI, intelligence institutions, ministries	Integrating different counterterrorism instruments	Increasingly formalized through national policy frameworks

Source: Government of Indonesia, Law No. 15/2003 as amended by Law No. 5/2018; Presidential Regulation No. 46/2010 as amended by Presidential Regulation No. 12/2012; Presidential Regulation No. 7/2021 and its Annex; BNPT regulations and official reports.

Table 4 indicates that the multidimensional approach consists of the coexistence and coordination of multiple instruments rather than the elimination of coercive measures. Law enforcement and intelligence remained important throughout the observation period, while prevention, deradicalization, community engagement, and interagency coordination became increasingly institutionalized.

Cross-Period Synthesis of the Results

The results demonstrate three principal patterns of change between 2002 and 2024. First, the character of the terrorist threat became increasingly diverse. The early post-Bali period was dominated by the relatively hierarchical JI network. Subsequent periods involved armed groups such as MIT, transnational ideological influence associated with ISIS, decentralized cells, and individual or family-based mobilization. The operational environment also expanded from predominantly physical spaces to include digital communication and online radicalization.

Second, the composition of state responses expanded. Law enforcement and intelligence remained core instruments throughout the observation period, but they were progressively supplemented by prevention, deradicalization, counter-radicalization, community engagement, and other non-coercive measures. Military capabilities also became more visible in specific operational contexts, particularly in Poso, while remaining embedded within a broader counterterrorism framework.

Third, the institutional architecture became more complex and integrated. The establishment of Densus 88 represented an early specialization of counterterrorism capacity,

followed by the establishment of BNPT and subsequent expansion of interagency and preventive mechanisms. The RAN PE framework further institutionalized cross-government cooperation and provided a formal basis for broader societal participation.

Taken together, these results indicate a gradual transformation in the configuration of Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy. The evidence does not indicate a complete transition from military or law-enforcement instruments to non-coercive approaches. Instead, it shows an expansion and diversification of strategic instruments in response to changes in terrorist organizational structures, operational environments, and mobilization patterns. The theoretical significance and strategic implications of these findings are examined in the Discussion section.

DISCUSSION

From Law-Enforcement-Oriented Responses to a Multidimensional Counterterrorism Approach

The findings demonstrate that Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy underwent a gradual process of strategic and institutional adaptation between 2002 and 2024. The evolution was not characterized by a complete replacement of military or law-enforcement instruments. Rather, the findings indicate a gradual expansion and reconfiguration of the instruments employed by the state. During the early period, counterterrorism was predominantly organized around intelligence, investigation, arrest, prosecution, and the disruption of terrorist networks. Over time, these instruments were supplemented by institutional coordination, prevention, deradicalization, community engagement, and other non-coercive measures.

This pattern can be understood through the concept of asymmetric warfare proposed by Hoffman (2004). Asymmetric conflict involves strategic interaction between actors with substantially different capabilities, in which the weaker actor may compensate for its material disadvantage by adopting indirect strategies. In the Indonesian context, terrorist organizations did not attempt to compete with the state through conventional military capabilities. Instead, terrorist networks exploited organizational flexibility, limited-scale attacks, clandestine networks, local environments, and later digital communication to generate effects disproportionate to their material resources. Consequently, the state response also had to adapt beyond a single instrument of coercive enforcement.

The findings therefore suggest that the development of Indonesian counterterrorism was closely related to changes in the characteristics of the terrorist threat. The hierarchical organizational structure associated with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) during the early period provided a relatively identifiable target for intelligence and law-enforcement operations. Subsequent developments, including the emergence of armed groups in Poso, ISIS influence, decentralized networks, individual and family-based mobilization, and online radicalization, created a more fragmented threat environment. This diversification reduced the extent to which counterterrorism could rely exclusively on arrests or the disruption of organizational leadership (Magouirk et al., 2008).

The transition should consequently be understood as a process of strategic broadening rather than strategic replacement. Law enforcement remained an essential component throughout the entire period, while additional instruments were progressively incorporated into the counterterrorism framework. This interpretation is consistent with the multidimensional approach reflected in Indonesia's later counterterrorism policies, particularly the institutional framework surrounding the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism (RAN PE).

Strategic Adaptation to Changes in Terrorist Organization and Operational Environment

The findings also indicate that changes in terrorist organizational structures influenced the adaptation of state responses. During 2002–2009, the relatively hierarchical structure of JI enabled the state to focus substantially on intelligence-led investigation, arrests, prosecution, and the disruption of organizational leadership. The subsequent decline in the operational capacity of major JI figures illustrates the relevance of targeting organizational structures in weakening established terrorist networks.

However, organizational disruption did not eliminate the broader conditions associated with terrorist mobilization. Price (2012) argues that terrorist organizations may decline through several pathways, including leadership decapitation, loss of public support, repression, organizational transformation, and other forms of strategic adaptation. The Indonesian case illustrates this complexity. The weakening of established JI leadership was followed by the emergence of other forms of terrorist mobilization rather than the disappearance of the underlying threat. The development of MIT in Poso and the subsequent

influence of ISIS demonstrated that terrorist activity could be reorganized around different organizational structures and operational environments.

Price (2012) provides an additional explanation by emphasizing the interaction between structural conditions and strategic calculations in terrorist behavior. From this perspective, counterterrorism effectiveness cannot be understood solely through the number of arrests or the elimination of individual leaders. The state must also respond to the structural and organizational conditions that allow violent extremist networks to regenerate, recruit, communicate, and maintain support.

This is particularly relevant to the Indonesian experience after 2016. The simultaneous existence of urban attacks, family-based mobilization, ISIS-inspired networks, and armed groups in Poso produced different operational requirements. The state consequently employed differentiated responses according to the characteristics of the threat. Security operations remained relevant for armed groups operating in geographically difficult environments, whereas prevention, deradicalization, and community-oriented approaches became increasingly relevant to decentralized forms of radicalization and recruitment.

The findings therefore support the proposition that the evolution of Indonesian counterterrorism was partly driven by the changing organizational and operational characteristics of terrorism itself. Strategic adaptation occurred because the threat environment became more heterogeneous, requiring a broader combination of instruments.

The Role of Whole-of-Government Coordination in Strategic Evolution

A major finding of this study is the increasing importance of institutional coordination. The establishment of BNPT in 2010 represented an important institutional development because counterterrorism was increasingly addressed as a responsibility extending beyond the police and security sector. The subsequent development of RAN PE further institutionalized cooperation among government institutions and encouraged the participation of civil society.

This development can be interpreted through the whole-of-government approach discussed by Christensen and Lægreid (2007). A whole-of-government framework seeks to overcome fragmentation by improving coordination among institutions that previously operated primarily within their respective organizational mandates. In counterterrorism, such

coordination is particularly relevant because the threat encompasses security, legal, social, ideological, educational, correctional, and community dimensions.

The findings demonstrate that the Indonesian approach gradually incorporated these dimensions. Law enforcement remained necessary for investigation and disruption, while prevention and deradicalization addressed processes occurring before and after terrorist involvement. Community engagement and reintegration added a social dimension to counterterrorism, while interagency coordination provided an institutional mechanism for combining these instruments.

The multidimensional approach therefore does not mean that all counterterrorism activities are conducted by a single institution. Instead, it reflects a broader division and coordination of responsibilities among institutions with different capabilities. This represents an important distinction from the early period, when counterterrorism was more strongly associated with law enforcement and specialized police operations.

The development of RAN PE is particularly significant in this respect because it provides a framework for integrating preventive and enforcement-oriented measures. The findings consequently indicate that institutional evolution was not merely an administrative development but also contributed to the transformation of the strategic conception of counterterrorism.

Reconfiguration of the Military Role within Counterterrorism

The findings concerning TNI involvement require a more nuanced interpretation. The evolution of counterterrorism in Indonesia did not result in a straightforward militarization of counterterrorism. Instead, the military role was reconfigured within a broader framework in which the police remained central to domestic counterterrorism enforcement.

The experience of Operation Tinombala illustrates this reconfiguration. The operational environment in Poso differed from the urban and network-oriented environment associated with many earlier terrorist attacks. The geographical characteristics of the region and the presence of an armed group created operational requirements that could involve military capabilities. Consequently, TNI participation became more visible in the security response.

This development can be interpreted through Feaver's (2003) civil-military relations framework, particularly the principal-agent relationship between civilian authorities and the military. In a democratic system, the expansion of military involvement in domestic security requires institutional mechanisms that establish authority, operational boundaries, and civilian oversight. Indonesia's legal framework subsequently recognized a role for TNI in counterterrorism through the broader framework of military operations other than war (OMSP).

Haripin (2020) further highlights that the post-Reformasi development of OMSP creates a space in which the role of the military in non-war missions is shaped by political and institutional bargaining. This is relevant to counterterrorism because the increasing involvement of TNI does not automatically imply that counterterrorism has become a military mission in its entirety.

The findings instead suggest a functional differentiation of military and law-enforcement capabilities. Police institutions retain the central role in investigation, arrest, and prosecution, while military capabilities may become relevant when the operational environment requires capabilities associated with armed operations, territorial operations, or difficult geographical conditions. Thus, the evolution is better characterized as a reconfiguration of roles within an increasingly integrated framework rather than a transfer of counterterrorism authority from Polri to TNI.

From Coercive Disruption to Prevention, Deradicalization, and Community Engagement

Another important aspect of the findings is the growing significance of preventive and social approaches. The early counterterrorism response was primarily concerned with identifying, arresting, prosecuting, and disrupting terrorist actors. While these measures remain necessary, the subsequent development of prevention and deradicalization indicates recognition that terrorist threats may persist through processes of recruitment, ideological dissemination, social networks, and reintegration challenges.

This development is consistent with Kilcullen's (2009) argument that counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies can face limitations when coercive measures are disconnected from the social environment in which violent actors operate. Excessive reliance on coercion may create conditions in which local communities become alienated or less willing to cooperate with the state. Although terrorism and insurgency are

not identical phenomena, the broader strategic lesson concerning the importance of population support and legitimacy is relevant to counterterrorism.

The Indonesian findings show an increasing emphasis on community-based and preventive instruments, particularly during the later period. Deradicalization and disengagement efforts are also consistent with Cronin's (2009) observation that terrorist organizations may weaken when members lose commitment, organizational support, or social relationships that sustain participation.

This suggests that counterterrorism outcomes should not be assessed exclusively through operational indicators such as arrests or the elimination of terrorist leaders. A multidimensional framework also seeks to reduce the conditions that enable recruitment and organizational regeneration. Consequently, prevention, disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration represent complementary components rather than alternatives to law enforcement.

Strategic Factors Driving the Evolution of Counterterrorism

The findings identify three interconnected factors underlying the evolution of Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy. First, changes in the strategic characteristics of the threat required adaptation. The movement from hierarchical organizations toward more decentralized and fluid forms of mobilization reduced the applicability of a single organizational targeting strategy. Different threat structures required different combinations of intelligence, enforcement, military capabilities, prevention, and community-based measures.

Second, the diversification of state instruments expanded the scope of counterterrorism. The establishment of BNPT, the development of prevention and deradicalization programs, and the implementation of RAN PE demonstrate that counterterrorism increasingly involved institutions beyond traditional security agencies. This diversification allowed the state to address multiple stages of the radicalization and terrorist activity process.

Third, institutional learning and coordination contributed to the evolution. Repeated exposure to different forms of terrorist activity provided opportunities for Indonesian institutions to develop and adjust organizational arrangements. The emergence of more

formal coordination mechanisms suggests that counterterrorism gradually moved toward a more integrated institutional configuration.

These factors should not be interpreted as evidence of a linear or complete transformation. Elements of the earlier approach remained present throughout the later periods. Instead, the findings indicate cumulative adaptation in which new instruments were added to existing capabilities. The resulting framework was therefore broader and more differentiated than the predominantly law-enforcement-oriented approach that characterized the immediate post-Bali period.

Implications for Indonesian Defense Doctrine

The evolution identified in this study has implications for the conceptualization of Indonesia's defense doctrine. First, counterterrorism should be understood as a cross-sectoral security challenge rather than exclusively as a military or law-enforcement problem. The multidimensional character of the threat requires institutional mechanisms capable of coordinating security, intelligence, prevention, legal, correctional, and community-based instruments.

Second, the role of TNI requires clear functional boundaries within the broader counterterrorism architecture. The findings indicate that military capabilities can be relevant in specific operational environments, particularly when the threat involves armed groups operating in difficult geographical areas. However, such involvement needs to remain institutionally differentiated from the routine law-enforcement functions performed by Polri.

Third, the development of multidimensional counterterrorism requires continued emphasis on interagency coordination. A whole-of-government framework is meaningful only when institutional responsibilities, information-sharing mechanisms, operational procedures, and accountability arrangements are sufficiently clear. Without these mechanisms, the diversification of actors may increase rather than reduce institutional fragmentation.

Finally, the findings suggest that Indonesian defense doctrine should account for the changing nature of asymmetric threats. Terrorist organizations may combine physical operations, decentralized mobilization, ideological dissemination, and digital communication. Consequently, strategic preparedness requires the capacity to integrate coercive and preventive instruments while maintaining appropriate institutional oversight.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy between 2002 and 2024 evolved through incremental strategic adaptation. The trajectory was not a simple movement from military to civilian or from enforcement to prevention. Rather, it involved the gradual integration of law enforcement, intelligence, military capabilities, prevention, deradicalization, community engagement, and interagency coordination. This multidimensional configuration reflects the changing nature of asymmetric threats and provides a basis for understanding how Indonesia has progressively adapted its counterterrorism architecture within a post-Reformasi civil-military framework.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy evolved gradually from a predominantly law-enforcement-oriented approach in the aftermath of the 2002 Bali bombings toward a more multidimensional framework by 2024. This evolution was driven by changes in terrorist organizational structures, operational environments, and forms of mobilization, which required the state to broaden its strategic instruments beyond intelligence, investigation, arrest, and prosecution. The findings show that prevention, deradicalization, community engagement, interagency coordination, and the selective involvement of military capabilities were progressively incorporated into the counterterrorism architecture. Thus, the evolution represents strategic adaptation and institutional expansion rather than a complete replacement of law enforcement by military or non-coercive approaches.

The study contributes to knowledge by providing a conceptual interpretation of Indonesia's counterterrorism evolution through the perspective of asymmetric warfare, strategic adaptation, whole-of-government coordination, and civil-military relations. The study demonstrates that the multidimensional character of contemporary counterterrorism emerges from the interaction between changing terrorist threats and the state's institutional adaptation to those threats. This perspective contributes to the understanding of counterterrorism as an evolving strategic configuration in which law-enforcement, military, preventive, social, and institutional instruments operate as complementary components within a broader national security framework.

Future research should empirically examine the effectiveness and interaction of the different components of Indonesia's multidimensional counterterrorism framework. Future

studies may employ comparative case studies across terrorist organizations, regions, or periods, as well as interviews with relevant government institutions, security actors, and civil-society organizations to examine how interagency coordination and community-based approaches operate in practice. Further research could also develop measurable indicators of strategic adaptation and institutional integration to enable systematic assessment of Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy over time.

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