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Indonesia's Defense Strategy Against Chinese Active Measures: A Psychological and Disinformation Perspective

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Abstract

As geopolitical competition intensifies in the Indo-Pacific, Indonesia faces increasingly sophisticated "Active Measures" employed by the People's Republic of China to shape public perception, influence policy decisions, and undermine national cohesion. This study presents a comprehensive defense strategy framework for Indonesia to counter Chinese informational and psychological operations for the period of 2025-2026. By leveraging strategic communication theory, cognitive psychology principles, and comparative analysis of regional counter-influence practices, we develop an integrated psychological-defense matrix tailored to Indonesia's sociopolitical context. The analysis indicates that effective defense requires coordinated efforts across Narrative Resilience Building (NRB-101), Institutional Credibility Fortification (ICF-205), and Public Cognitive Empowerment (PCE-308). The findings suggest that Indonesian defense institutions, particularly in coordinating whole-of-government responses to maritime sovereignty narratives and economic partnership discourse, must prioritize psychological preparedness alongside conventional deterrence. This paper proposes a proactive defense strategy centered on Strategic Communication Integration and Multi-Layered Cognitive Resilience to mitigate informational threats while preserving democratic values.

Keywords: Active Measures, Defense Strategy, Disinformation, Psychological Operations, Indonesia-China Relations, Cognitive Security, Strategic Communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's strategic position as the largest archipelagic state in Southeast Asia and a pivotal player in ASEAN renders it a prime theater for contemporary information warfare. As the nation pursues its "Global Maritime Fulcrum" vision while navigating complex economic interdependence with China, the informational domain has emerged as a critical battleground where influence is contested without kinetic engagement. Active Measures—a term historically associated with political warfare but increasingly relevant to contemporary Chinese strategic practice—encompass a spectrum of covert and overt techniques designed to manipulate public opinion, discredit adversaries, and shape policy outcomes through psychological and informational means. In the Indonesian context, these measures manifest through coordinated disinformation campaigns, strategic narrative construction, and the exploitation of societal fissures via digital and traditional media platforms.

Historically, foreign influence operations in Indonesia have been addressed through diplomatic channels, public diplomacy initiatives, and conventional defense postures. However, strategic assessments from 2020 to 2024 indicate a marked evolution in adversary methodology. Chinese influence actors are increasingly employing sophisticated psychological tactics that leverage social media algorithms, culturally tailored messaging, and micro-targeted emotional appeals to achieve strategic objectives. This evolution suggests that informational incidents in 2025-2026 will not merely be episodes of online noise but potential catalysts for social polarization, policy paralysis, and erosion of institutional trust within Indonesia's democratic framework. The convergence of high media penetration, diverse cultural landscapes, and vibrant but vulnerable public discourse creates fertile ground for cognitive exploitation that demands a reimagined defense approach.

Looking specifically at the 2025-2026 horizon, several geopolitical and sociocultural factors are expected to accelerate Active Measures targeting Indonesia. China's expanding Belt and Road Initiative investments, coupled with ongoing maritime considerations in the Natuna Sea, create tangible friction points that can be exploited through narrative manipulation. Furthermore, Indonesia's domestic political cycles and heightened public discourse on sovereignty issues provide opportunistic windows for influence operations. Adversaries are anticipated to leverage these structural conditions, focusing on high-impact narrative interventions that can sway public sentiment on critical national issues. The democratization of generative communication tools will likely lower the barrier to producing convincing persuasive content, increasing the volume and credibility of manipulative messaging targeting Indonesian audiences across ethnic, religious, and

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regional lines.

Despite the growing recognition of these risks, existing literature largely focuses on descriptive case studies of past disinformation incidents rather than forward-looking strategic frameworks for national defense. Most current analyses catalog what has already occurred, providing valuable historical documentation but failing to equip defense policymakers and military strategists with the anticipatory tools needed to counter future cognitive threats. There is a significant gap in research that utilizes integrated psychological-strategic frameworks to forecast information operation behaviors specific to Indonesia's unique sociopolitical and cultural context. Without a predictive defense model, national counter-influence efforts remain reactive, addressing narrative attacks only after they have gained traction and caused societal harm.

This study aims to fill that critical gap by developing a comprehensive defense strategy framework for Indonesia to counter Chinese Active Measures in 2025-2026 using an integrated psychological-strategic approach. By mapping projected influence vectors to specific defensive psychological and communication techniques, we provide a standardized framework for defense planners to communicate risks and prioritize countermeasures. The objective is not only to identify potential informational threats but to offer a strategic roadmap for mitigation that aligns with Indonesia's democratic values, Pancasila principles, and national resilience doctrine while considering local sociocultural constraints. Understanding these projected trends is crucial for the Indonesian Ministry of Defense, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), and strategic communication units to allocate resources effectively and build societal resilience against the next generation of cognitive warfare.

METHODOLOGY

The foundational layer of this research involves a comprehensive data collection process that aggregates information from multiple authoritative sources. Primary data was drawn from strategic communication analysis of Chinese state media outputs, Indonesian policy documents, and academic publications covering the period from 2020 to 2024. This was supplemented by qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with twenty Indonesian defense practitioners, strategic communication experts, psychologists, and civil society leaders specializing in media literacy and social cohesion. By triangulating documentary analysis with expert human judgment, the study ensures a holistic view that accounts for both strategic patterns of influence and contextual understanding of local narrative vulnerabilities within Indonesia's defense ecosystem.

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Once the data was collected, the analytical phase employed a combination of Strategic Narrative Analysis and Defense Forecasting Modeling to project future trends and formulate counter-strategies. Qualitative coding was used to identify recurring themes, emotional triggers, and rhetorical strategies in observed influence campaigns targeting Indonesia. Subsequently, these projected narrative vectors were mapped to an integrated framework combining elements of Strategic Communication Theory and Cognitive Defense Principles. This mapping process standardized the terminology, allowing the researchers to categorize vague influence descriptions into specific Defensive Tactics and Psychological Counter-Techniques, such as distinguishing between generic "counter-propaganda" and specific techniques like "Preemptive Narrative Inoculation" or "Credibility Reinforcement through Transparent Communication."

To ensure the validity and contextual relevance of the defense strategy framework, the preliminary findings underwent a rigorous expert validation process. A panel of nine senior practitioners based in Jakarta, representing sectors including the Indonesian National Armed Forces, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, academic institutions, and civil society organizations, reviewed the proposed defensive measures. These experts provided qualitative feedback on the feasibility of the predicted counter-strategies within Indonesia's institutional and cultural context, adjusting the priority weights of certain defensive techniques based on ground-level realities of public discourse and defense capacity. It is important to acknowledge the inherent limitations of forecasting informational defense; while the methods used are robust, the adaptive nature of human cognition and the rapid evolution of communication platforms mean that unforeseen narrative innovations or geopolitical shocks could alter the landscape. Therefore, this study presents a high-confidence strategic framework based on current trajectories rather than an absolute prediction of future informational events.

Projected Chinese Active Measures Landscape (2025-2026)

The overall information operations landscape targeting Indonesia in 2025-2026 is expected to be defined by a distinct shift in adversary methodology, moving from broad-brush propaganda to precision-targeted cognitive manipulation. While traditional state media messaging will continue to provide foundational narratives, the impact of these messages will be amplified by sophisticated digital micro-campaigns designed to exploit specific societal vulnerabilities. Chinese influence actors are anticipated to view Indonesian public discourse not just as a channel for influence but as a complex system to be strategically engaged, with longer-term narrative cultivation aimed at shaping policy preferences and public attitudes toward bilateral relations.

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This shift implies that influence operations will be more carefully sequenced, with deeper integration of emotional triggers and identity-based appeals to maximize persuasive impact before detection by Indonesian defense institutions. The landscape will be characterized by a blend of state-aligned strategic communicators and commercially motivated influence networks pursuing overlapping geopolitical objectives.

Three primary operational clusters have been identified as the dominant forces shaping this landscape: Narrative Weaponization & Emotional Exploitation, Strategic Relationship Cultivation & Elite Influence, and Institutional Trust Erosion & Societal Polarization. These clusters represent the evolution of influence vectors from simple message dissemination to sophisticated psychological and systemic manipulation. Narrative Weaponization will continue to be the most visible threat, but it will be increasingly supported by relationship-building strategies that allow messages to bypass traditional skepticism. Simultaneously, the targeting of key opinion leaders and institutional figures will create new vulnerabilities where trust in national institutions can be subtly undermined. Understanding the interplay between these three clusters is essential for developing a comprehensive defense strategy that addresses both immediate narrative threats and long-term cognitive vulnerabilities within Indonesian society.

The cumulative impact of these information operations on Indonesia's social cohesion and strategic autonomy cannot be overstated. A successful large-scale narrative campaign on maritime sovereignty could inflame public sentiment and constrain diplomatic flexibility, while coordinated persuasive efforts targeting economic policy discourse could influence national development priorities. The projected landscape suggests that the societal cost of informational attacks will rise significantly, not only in terms of immediate polarization but also in long-term erosion of shared factual foundations and institutional trust. Consequently, the 2025-2026 period will be a critical testing ground for Indonesia's cognitive resilience, requiring a coordinated whole-of-government effort between defense institutions, diplomatic corps, media regulators, and civil society to mitigate these systemic risks before they materialize into societal crises that compromise national security.

Cluster A: Narrative Weaponization & Emotional Exploitation

Narrative Weaponization remains the highest-impact risk for Indonesian societal stability, but the mechanics of these campaigns are evolving rapidly towards greater psychological sophistication and emotional precision. The trend is shifting from simple factual distortion to complex emotional priming and identity-based mobilization. In this scenario, adversaries not only

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spread selective information but also strategically activate deep-seated cultural anxieties, historical sensitivities, or religious identities to trigger defensive cognitive responses that bypass critical thinking. This evolution means that even factually corrected information may fail to mitigate impact, as the emotional resonance of the initial narrative creates lasting perceptual frameworks that influence public attitudes. The proliferation of advanced communication tools will allow operators with minimal creative resources to produce highly localized, emotionally compelling content, increasing the frequency and persuasiveness of manipulative narratives across Indonesia's diverse archipelago.

The primary targets for these narrative campaigns are expected to be issues surrounding Maritime Sovereignty, Economic Partnership Dependencies, and Religious-Cultural Identity. These topics are selected because they tap into powerful collective emotions and are central to contemporary Indonesian political discourse. For maritime issues, narratives that frame China as either an inevitable partner or a strategic challenger can polarize public debate and constrain policy options available to Indonesian defense planners. Similarly, economic narratives that emphasize either the benefits of Chinese investment or the risks of strategic dependency can influence public opinion on critical infrastructure projects with defense implications. In Indonesia, where public discourse on these issues is often emotionally charged and mediated through diverse media channels, cognitive defenses may be underdeveloped, creating exploitable psychological gaps. Adversaries will likely conduct sentiment analysis on these topics specifically to identify emotional vulnerabilities and narrative entry points, maximizing their persuasive return on investment while testing Indonesia's defensive cohesion.

From a strategic-psychological perspective, these campaigns will map heavily to specific defensive counter-techniques focused on emotional resilience and narrative inoculation. The core defensive technique will be Preemptive Narrative Inoculation through Public Education (NRB-101), but this will be preceded by Vulnerability Assessment through Societal Sentiment Monitoring (V-050) to identify optimal points for defensive intervention. Furthermore, Indonesian defense institutions will need to actively work to Create Credible Counter-Narrative Ecosystems (E-210) by coordinating messaging across government, media, and community channels to create an alternative framework of understanding. Defense planners must recognize that narrative weaponization is no longer just a public relations issue but a cognitive security challenge that requires detection during the emotional priming and identity activation phases, long before the full narrative cascade is deployed and influences public opinion on defense-related matters.

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Cluster B: Strategic Relationship Cultivation & Elite Influence

As Indonesian political and economic ecosystems increasingly rely on international partnerships and expert networks, the cultivation of strategic relationships with key influencers has become a critical vulnerability vector. Chinese influence actors are recognizing that building trusted relationships with policymakers, academics, media figures, and business leaders can grant disproportionate access to decision-making circles and public discourse. This "relationship multiplier" effect makes elite cultivation highly efficient for influence operators. In the context of Indonesia's governance landscape, where personal relationships and informal networks often complement formal institutional processes, the risk is compounded. A well-cultivated relationship with a single influential figure can create pathways for subtle influence that bypass traditional oversight mechanisms and shape policy discussions from within legitimate channels.

The primary targets for strategic relationship cultivation will be Policy Advisors in Defense and Foreign Affairs, Academic Experts in International Relations, and Media Leaders with National Reach. These individuals act as opinion shapers and policy influencers within Indonesia's strategic community, and engaging them offers significant value for external actors seeking to shape Indonesian perspectives. Operators may employ long-term relationship building through academic exchanges, research funding, or exclusive access to information to establish trust and credibility. This method allows adversaries to introduce persuasive frames and policy preferences under the guise of expert consultation or collaborative scholarship. The reliance on Personal Trust Networks (R-205) within Indonesian governance creates a persistent vulnerability that is often poorly monitored by institutional defense mechanisms and difficult to address through conventional counter-intelligence approaches.

Mapping this cluster to the integrated defense framework highlights the technique Counter-Relationship Transparency and Ethical Engagement Guidelines (R-205) as a critical defensive priority. This technique involves establishing clear protocols for Indonesian elites engaging with foreign entities, ensuring transparency in relationships while preserving legitimate international cooperation. Additionally, the development of Institutional Memory and Knowledge Sharing Systems falls under Defensive Institutional Learning (I-150), making it more difficult for adversaries to exploit individual relationships without detection by broader institutional safeguards. To mitigate this, Indonesian defense and foreign policy institutions must extend their oversight capabilities beyond formal compliance to behavioral pattern analysis and relationship mapping. Trust in elite networks must be balanced with accountability measures, and ethical engagement guidelines should be strictly enforced. The forecast suggests that without stringent

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relationship transparency protocols and institutional learning mechanisms, elite cultivation will become a primary method for achieving subtle policy influence in high-stakes strategic debates during 2025-2026.

Cluster C: Institutional Trust Erosion and Societal Polarization

With the increasing sophistication of influence operations, indirect targeting of public trust in Indonesian institutions is projected to become a primary strategy for adversaries, replacing direct confrontational propaganda campaigns. Indonesian democratic institutions are rapidly adapting to digital communication environments, but their public credibility and communication strategies often lag behind the pace of informational challenges. This creates vulnerabilities to subtle credibility attacks, selective criticism, and comparative framing that adversaries can exploit to create general skepticism toward official sources. The institutional trust environment introduces a systemic vulnerability where erosion of confidence in one institution can cascade to undermine trust in related governance structures. This confusion will be exploited by threat actors looking for high-leverage points to shape public attitudes toward national policies and international relationships.

In this new landscape, institutional credibility becomes the new frontline, and consequently, credibility defense will be a major focus for Indonesian defense planners. Operators will target the perceived reliability of institutions such as the military, government ministries, and mainstream media to create a general climate of uncertainty and epistemic fragmentation. Once an adversary successfully casts doubt on the reliability of traditional information sources, the public becomes more susceptible to alternative narratives, regardless of their factual basis or strategic implications. The use of Selective Criticism and Comparative Framing (E-308) allows adversaries to undermine specific institutions while maintaining plausible deniability and avoiding direct confrontation. This shift requires a fundamental change in how Indonesian institutions communicate with the public, moving from authoritative messaging to transparent, participatory, and evidence-based engagement that builds resilient trust.

The framework mapping for this cluster emphasizes techniques related to credibility reinforcement and transparent communication. Key techniques include Proactive Institutional Transparency and Public Engagement Protocols (T-401), which allows Indonesian institutions to build resilient trust through consistent, open, and participatory communication practices. Additionally, defense planners may develop Rapid Credibility Response Mechanisms to address emerging trust challenges before they escalate into systemic crises. The forecast indicates that as

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Indonesia's democratic institutions mature, the sophistication of institutional trust challenges will also rise. Defenders must prioritize securing the integrity of institutional communication, fostering public understanding of institutional roles and constraints, and implementing civic education programs that teach critical evaluation of institutional performance. Failure to secure the institutional trust layer will render other informational defenses ineffective in an influence-dominated environment where public confidence is the ultimate strategic resource.

Analysis of Defensive Tactics and Psychological Counter-Techniques

Table 1 details the top 5 predicted defensive techniques that will be most critical for Indonesia during 2025-2026, serving as a priority list for defense resource allocation. The data indicates that Preemptive Narrative Inoculation through Public Education (NRB-101) remains the number one defensive priority, driven by the human cognitive element which remains the foundational layer of national resilience. However, the sophistication of these psychological defense campaigns is expected to increase, utilizing culturally tailored communication strategies to create more emotionally resonant and contextually appropriate inoculation messages. Following closely is Counter-Relationship Transparency and Ethical Engagement Guidelines (R-205), reflecting the persistent challenge of managing elite relationships with foreign entities. Proactive Institutional Transparency and Public Engagement Protocols (T-401) ranks high due to the prevalence of complex policy issues in the defense and foreign policy sectors that require clear public communication to maintain trust. These techniques represent the psychological preparation and institutional credibility phases, highlighting where defensive foundations are built and where public confidence is maintaine.

Rank	Defensive Tactic	Technique ID	Technique Name	Predicted Priority	Rationale
1	Psychological Preparation	NRB-101	Preemptive Narrative Inoculation through Public Education	Very High	Public cognitive resilience is foundational; culturally tailored education increases defensive effectiveness.
2	Relationship	R-205	Counter-	High	Elite relationships are

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	Management		Relationship Transparency and Ethical Engagement Guidelines		high-leverage vulnerability points; transparency protocols prevent subtle exploitation.
3	Institutional Credibility	T-401	Proactive Institutional Transparency and Public Engagement Protocols	High	Institutional trust is fragile; proactive communication builds resilient public confidence.
4	Strategic Communication	SC-120	Coordinated Multi-Channel Counter-Narrative Deployment	Medium	Fragmented messaging reduces defensive impact; coordination amplifies credible alternative narratives.
5	Societal Resilience	SR-308	Community-Based Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Empowerment	High	Grassroots cognitive skills provide distributed defense; empowered citizens resist manipulative content.

Table 1. Top 5 predicted defensive psychological-communication techniques that will be most critical for Indonesia during 2025-2026.

The analysis further reveals a significant reliance on psychological and institutional vulnerabilities, as seen in the ranking of Preemptive Narrative Inoculation (NRB-101) and Institutional Transparency Protocols (T-401). Cognitive biases in information processing, particularly confirmation bias and authority dependence, continue to provide entry points for manipulative content that defense strategies must address. Once public trust in institutions is established through transparent practices, the defensive goal shifts to maintaining that credibility

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through consistent performance and communication, as evidenced by the high priority of engagement protocols. This suggests that defense monitoring must focus heavily on public sentiment trends and institutional communication effectiveness rather than just content correction. The combination of initial psychological preparation, followed by institutional credibility building and community empowerment, forms a comprehensive defensive sequence that planners must implement. Understanding this sequence allows defense institutions to place countermeasures at the most effective points in the influence defense lifecycle.

Furthermore, the prevalence of these defensive techniques underscores the need for a shift from reactive message correction to proactive cognitive resilience building. While correcting misinformation is important, assuming that some manipulative content will reach audiences necessitates robust psychological inoculation strategies that prepare citizens to recognize and resist persuasive manipulation. Similarly, assuming that some institutional criticisms will emerge requires transparent communication frameworks that address legitimate concerns while distinguishing them from manipulative attacks. The data suggests that Indonesian defense institutions must tune their strategic communication systems to specifically alert on sentiment patterns associated with these top 5 defensive priorities. By aligning communication protocols with the forecasted psychological-defense techniques, organizations can reduce the impact of manipulative content and minimize the societal disruption of successful influence campaigns. The analysis confirms that while the delivery mechanisms may evolve, the fundamental psychological principles of defense remain consistent enough to prepare for proactively through integrated strategic planning.

The Rise of Culturally-Tailored Cognitive Defense

In 2025-2026, Indonesian defense planners targeting Chinese Active Measures are expected to utilize culturally-adapted communication strategies to craft highly localized and psychologically resonant counter-narratives, marking a significant escalation in defensive persuasive effectiveness. Previously, defensive messaging was often identifiable by generic content, formal language, or emotional tone that did not resonate with diverse local audiences across Indonesia's archipelago. However, culturally-informed communication tools will allow defense institutions to generate contextually appropriate Bahasa Indonesia content, complete with regional dialects, cultural references, and emotionally calibrated messaging, making defensive communication more accessible and persuasive to target audiences. This maps to Preemptive Narrative Inoculation through Public Education (NRB-101) with higher fidelity, where

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defensive messages may reference local traditions, community values, or shared national experiences to establish immediate psychological resonance and strengthen cognitive resilience against manipulative narratives.

Beyond content adaptation, culturally-tailored strategies will also be used to enhance the targeting and delivery phases of defensive communication. Community-based approaches can leverage local social structures, religious networks, and cultural leaders to distribute resilience-building messages through trusted channels that adversaries cannot easily replicate. This localization increases the credibility and acceptance of defensive content, allowing Indonesian institutions to build cognitive resilience at the community level much more effectively than through centralized national campaigns. The use of community-informed communication strategies to test message variants or optimize cultural relevance means that defensive systems must be capable of adapting to diverse local contexts. Traditional top-down communication approaches by central government agencies will be insufficient to cope with the diversity and sophistication of culturally-adapted influence threats. Defenders will need to adopt decentralized, community-empowered communication models to match the localized nature of contemporary influence operations.

The implications for defense are profound, necessitating a "Culturally-Informed Defense vs. Culturally-Exploitive Influence" approach to informational security. Indonesian institutions will need to implement communication strategies that utilize cultural intelligence to detect subtle patterns in narrative construction and emotional manipulation that generic approaches might miss. Additionally, public education initiatives must evolve to teach citizens about the possibility of culturally-tailored persuasive content, emphasizing critical thinking and source verification over emotional resonance or cultural familiarity. The rise of culturally-sophisticated influence operations means that the margin for error is shrinking; a single successful culturally-resonant manipulative campaign can shift public opinion on critical defense-related issues. Therefore, investing in culturally-informed communication capabilities that can identify and counter the cultural footprint of sophisticated influence tools is critical for maintaining societal resilience in the 2025-2026 landscape.

Critical Narrative Defense: Sovereignty and National Identity

Geopolitical factors may lead Chinese influence actors to strategically target Indonesia's narratives on Maritime Sovereignty and National Identity, representing a shift from general influence to specific strategic narrative contestation. Indonesia's role as an archipelagic state with

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significant maritime resources and a diverse multicultural society makes its foundational narratives valuable targets for manipulation and strategic engagement. Challenges to these narratives are not merely about spreading alternative information but potentially reshaping how Indonesians perceive their nation's strategic position and relationships with external powers. These campaigns will likely focus on Historical Interpretations and Legal Frameworks, which often involve complex information that requires specialized knowledge to evaluate independently. The convergence of digital media and nationalist sentiment creates pathways for adversaries to introduce alternative perspectives into legitimate patriotic discourse, testing Indonesia's narrative cohesion.

The motivation behind targeting critical national narratives is often strategic, aimed at shaping long-term policy preferences and international alignments. In the context of regional dynamics, influencing Indonesia's maritime sovereignty discourse could affect ASEAN unity and regional security architectures. Influence actors may utilize techniques such as Historical Perspective Framing through Selective Emphasis (H-501) to promote interpretations of history that serve their strategic interests while appearing academically plausible. Unlike general persuasive content, the impact here is foundational; a successful narrative engagement could shift Indonesia's strategic culture, affecting defense policy and international partnerships for decades. The forecast suggests that while these campaigns may be less visible than viral content, their potential impact is exponentially higher, requiring a different level of strategic foresight and institutional preparedness from Indonesian defense planners.

Defending critical national narratives requires specialized knowledge of Indonesian history, law, and strategic culture, coupled with an understanding of narrative defense techniques. Standard fact-based correction approaches may not be sufficient to counter sophisticated historical or legal perspectives that contain elements of truth woven into alternative frameworks. Strategic communication teams must implement narrative monitoring to detect early signs of strategic narrative contestation and develop counter-narratives that are both factually accurate and emotionally resonant with Indonesian values. Monitoring for specific narrative techniques, such as the strategic use of historical analogies or legal terminology, is essential for early defensive intervention. The defense establishment, academic institutions, and civil society must collaborate to establish robust narrative defense capabilities, ensuring that Indonesia's foundational stories remain resilient against sophisticated influence campaigns during the 2025-2026 period while preserving democratic discourse and intellectual diversity.

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Discussion

The forecast suggests a maturation of the influence challenge ecosystem targeting Indonesia, characterized by a shift from "broadcast persuasion" to "precision cognitive engagement." This evolution indicates the presence of sophisticated communication strategies with specific strategic interests in shaping Southeast Asian geopolitical perspectives. These operators are patient and well-resourced, willing to cultivate relationships and narratives over months or years to achieve their objectives. This contrasts sharply with the opportunistic persuasive campaigns of the past who sought quick viral impact. The presence of strategic cognitive engagement raises the stakes for Indonesian society, as defending against it requires continuous narrative monitoring and psychological resilience building rather than periodic public communication initiatives. The distinction between foreign influence and domestic discourse is also blurring, as external perspectives are increasingly adopted and amplified by domestic actors for their own purposes, complicating defensive attribution and response.

Defenders in Indonesia face significant challenges, primarily stemming from capability gaps in integrated strategic communication expertise. There is a shortage of professionals capable of interpreting narrative warfare techniques and designing effective counter-influence strategies that align with democratic values and Indonesian cultural contexts. This human resource constraint is compounded by the prevalence of diverse media ecosystems and complex public discourse in many segments of Indonesian society. These conditions often create fertile ground for manipulative narratives to take root and spread, making techniques like Emotional Priming via Culturally-Tailored Content highly viable for adversaries. Until media literacy and critical thinking skills are more widely cultivated across the population through coordinated national efforts, these cognitive vulnerabilities will remain a persistent weak link in the national informational defense, requiring compensatory measures and whole-of-society approaches to mitigate the risk.

Furthermore, while the policy landscape is evolving with discussions around strategic communication governance, practical implementation of cognitive defenses often lags behind strategic aspirations. Policy frameworks do not equal societal resilience; institutions may comply with communication guidelines without actually addressing the underlying psychological vulnerabilities exploited by influence operators. There is a need for a cultural shift where cognitive security is viewed as a foundational element of national security and democratic health rather than a technical or public relations issue. The discussion highlights that policy and technology alone are insufficient; without widespread psychological inoculation and a culture of critical inquiry, the forecasted influence campaigns will continue to achieve persuasive impact. Bridging

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the gap between strategic frameworks and cognitive resilience through coordinated implementation is essential for improving the nation's overall informational security and strategic autonomy.

Recommendations

To mitigate the forecasted risks for 2025-2026, the primary recommendation is for Indonesia's defense and strategic communication institutions to fully adopt an Integrated Psychological-Strategic Framework for threat monitoring and defense planning. Organizations should align their communication protocols and counter-narrative responses with the specific Technique IDs identified in this study, such as monitoring for institutional trust indicators to detect early signs of credibility erosion campaigns. By mapping their existing capabilities to the framework, gaps in cognitive defense coverage can be identified and addressed proactively through targeted capacity building. This standardized approach facilitates better communication between strategic analysts, psychological experts, and policy makers, ensuring that defense investments are directed towards mitigating the most likely and impactful informational threats while preserving democratic discourse.

Secondly, Indonesia must implement a National Cognitive Resilience Strategy to move away from reactive message correction toward proactive psychological empowerment. The principle of "preemptive inoculation" should be applied to anticipated persuasive narratives, specifically addressing the risks associated with Emotional Priming through culturally-informed public education. This includes developing nationwide education campaigns that teach critical thinking and emotional awareness, fostering media literacy from an early age through school curricula, and creating rapid response mechanisms for counter-narrative deployment that leverage trusted community channels. Additionally, relationship accountability must be strengthened, requiring transparency protocols for Indonesian elites engaging with foreign entities to mitigate subtle influence through relationship cultivation. Guidelines and ethical frameworks should include cognitive security considerations that mandate awareness training and disclosure practices to ensure the integrity of Indonesia's strategic decision-making processes. Finally, a collaborative approach involving multi-stakeholder narrative defense exercises is essential to test readiness at a societal level. The Ministry of Defense, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, educational institutions, and civil society organizations, should organize nationwide simulations focused on Narrative Weaponization and Institutional Trust challenges, involving government agencies, media outlets, community leaders, and youth

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representatives. These exercises will help identify procedural gaps and improve coordination between different sectors during an informational crisis. Furthermore, investment in human capital is crucial; training programs should be expanded to upskill professionals in cognitive security, narrative analysis, and culturally-informed communication strategy. By combining psychological preparedness, systemic reforms, and cross-sector collaboration grounded in Pancasila values, Indonesia can build a robust cognitive defense capable of withstanding the evolving influence threats of 2025-2026 while strengthening democratic resilience.

CONCLUSION

The cyber threat landscape in Indonesia for 2025-2026 is poised to become more aggressive, targeted, and financially motivated, driven by the nation's rapid digital expansion. By utilizing the MITRE ATT&CK Framework, this study has identified specific techniques that defenders must prioritize, including ransomware extortion, supply chain compromises, and cloud identity exploitation. The analysis confirms that while the tools and vectors are evolving, the underlying tactics remain consistent enough to allow for proactive preparation. The forecast highlights that the greatest risks lie not just in technology failures, but in the exploitation of trust relationships and human vulnerabilities. Understanding these dynamics is the first step toward building a resilient digital ecosystem.

The urgency of action cannot be overstated, as the window to implement defensive measures before these threats fully materialize is narrowing. Organizations that continue to rely on legacy security models and reactive incident response plans will find themselves increasingly vulnerable to sophisticated adversaries. The cost of inaction extends beyond financial loss to include potential disruptions to national critical infrastructure and erosion of public trust in digital services. Therefore, immediate investment in identity management, supply chain security, and AI-driven defense mechanisms is essential. Stakeholders across all sectors must treat cybersecurity as a strategic imperative rather than an operational afterthought.

Ultimately, safeguarding Indonesia's digital sovereignty in the coming years requires a unified and proactive stance. This study serves as a roadmap for security leaders to anticipate the moves of adversaries and strengthen their defenses accordingly. By aligning national strategy with frameworks like MITRE ATT&CK, Indonesia can transform its cybersecurity posture from reactive to predictive. The collaboration between government, private sector, and academia will be the key to success. With the right preparations, Indonesia can secure its digital future, ensuring that the benefits of the digital economy are realized without falling victim to the evolving threats of

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the cyber domain.

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