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The Effectiveness of Utilizing Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Technology in Supporting Security Operations in the Indonesia–Malaysia Land Border Area

Agus Surya Sulendra[1] Thomas Gabriel[2] Tasdik Mustika Alam[3]
Study Program of Land Defense Strategy, Faculty of Defense Strategy, Republic of Indonesia Defense University, Jakarta, Indonesia[1,2,3]
Email: agussuryaalfatih@gmail.com[1] Jostgebi@gmail.com[2] tasdik11394@gmail.com[3]

Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of utilizing Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) technology in supporting land border security operations along the Indonesia–Malaysia border. The research addresses the increasing complexity of transnational threats that challenge conventional surveillance methods and require adaptive defense strategies. The objective of this study is to analyze the contribution of UAVs to border security operations, identify implementation constraints, and formulate optimization strategies for sustainable utilization. A qualitative descriptive-analytical method was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis involving military operational units, border security task forces, and local stakeholders in the Kalimantan border area. The findings indicate that UAVs significantly enhance early detection, real-time aerial surveillance, and tactical decision-making. However, their effectiveness remains constrained by limited operator capability, inadequate infrastructure, and restricted logistical and budgetary support. The study concludes that integrating UAV systems into command and control structures, improving operator competence, and strengthening intersectoral cooperation are essential to establishing a modern and adaptive border security system.

Keywords: UAV, Border Security, Indonesian Army, Indonesia–Malaysia Border

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelagic country, strategically positioned between two continents and two oceans, with extensive land and maritime borders exceeding 54,716 kilometers (BNPP, 2022). These border areas play a critical role in safeguarding national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security stability. Among Indonesia's land borders, the Indonesia–Malaysia border on the island of Kalimantan represents one of the most complex and strategically sensitive regions due to its vast geographical coverage, difficult terrain, and high intensity of cross-border interactions (Wangke, 2018). Border regions are no longer viewed merely as administrative boundaries, but as dynamic spaces where geopolitical, socio-economic, and security interests converge. In practice, these areas often become vulnerable to transnational crimes such as smuggling, illegal border crossings, narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, and illegal logging (Anggraini, 2020; Rahmansyah, 2019). The limited accessibility of remote border zones, coupled with rugged topography and dense forest coverage, has constrained conventional surveillance and patrol mechanisms, resulting in persistent security vulnerabilities (Arifin, 2021).

The Indonesia–Malaysia land border extends approximately 2,019 kilometers across Kalimantan and encompasses diverse natural features, including tropical forests, rivers, mountains, and artificial boundary markers established through bilateral agreements (Aelenei, 2001; Guo, 2005). Communities living along the border often maintain strong socio-cultural and economic ties across national boundaries, which increases cross-border mobility for trade, education, and social activities. However, disparities in infrastructure development and economic opportunities between Indonesian and Malaysian border regions have intensified economic dependency and created additional challenges for border law enforcement (Beni et al., 2021; Harefa et al., 2019). Operationally, land border security in Indonesia is primarily conducted by the Indonesian Army (TNI AD) through rotating Border Security Task Forces (*Satuan Tugas Pengamanan Perbatasan*). These units are responsible for border patrols, protection of boundary markers, monitoring of official and unofficial crossing routes, enforcement against illegal activities, and territorial development programs aimed at strengthening community relations (Subagyo, 2021). Despite sustained efforts, conventional patrol methods—whether on foot or via ground vehicles remain insufficient to provide comprehensive surveillance coverage across vast and difficult terrain, leaving many unofficial routes undetected (Akbar et al., 2019).

Recent developments in modern defense strategies emphasize the integration of advanced technologies to enhance situational awareness, surveillance reach, and operational efficiency. One of the most promising innovations in contemporary military operations is the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), which enable real-time aerial monitoring, early threat detection, rapid intelligence transmission, and reduced risk to personnel operating in high-threat or inaccessible environments (Wibowo, 2021). UAV technology has demonstrated significant potential in improving border security effectiveness by extending surveillance capabilities beyond the limitations of ground-based patrols (Firmandes & Yuwono, 2017). From a theoretical perspective, UAV deployment aligns with the broader framework of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), which emphasizes the transformative role of advanced technology in enhancing military capabilities and operational effectiveness (Putra, 2019). UAVs serve not only as surveillance tools but also as strategic instruments that support command and control integration, intelligence gathering, and rapid tactical decision-making. Their application in border security operations reflects a shift toward more adaptive, technology-driven defense strategies capable of responding to asymmetric and non-traditional threats (Posen, 1994; Prasetyo, 2022).

However, despite their strategic potential, the utilization of UAVs within Indonesian Army border security operations remains suboptimal. Key challenges include limited numbers of trained UAV operators, insufficient supporting infrastructure, inadequate integration with command and control systems, and constraints in logistics and defense budgeting (Saragih, 2020; Yusuf, 2022). This situation highlights a gap between the technological capabilities of UAV systems and their effective operational implementation in the field. Previous studies on UAV applications in military and security contexts have primarily focused on technological performance, policy frameworks, or general surveillance benefits. Yet, empirical research examining UAV effectiveness within the specific organizational, operational, and geographical context of Indonesia's land border security particularly along the Indonesia–Malaysia border remains limited. There is a need for more context-specific analysis that evaluates not only operational effectiveness, but also institutional constraints, supporting factors, and strategic optimization mechanisms. This research addresses that gap by analyzing the effectiveness of UAV technology utilization in supporting land border security operations along the Indonesia–Malaysia border. The study aims to (1) assess the contribution of UAVs to enhancing surveillance and early detection capabilities, (2) identify the challenges and limitations affecting their implementation, and (3) formulate strategic recommendations for optimizing UAV integration within Indonesian Army border security operations. By providing empirical insights and strategic guidance, this study seeks to contribute to defense and security scholarship and support policymakers and military practitioners in strengthening border security through technology-based approaches.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method with a descriptive–analytical approach to examine the effectiveness of utilizing Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) technology in supporting land border security operations along the Indonesia–Malaysia border. A qualitative approach was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of operational practices, institutional challenges, and strategic considerations related to UAV utilization within the Indonesian Army, particularly in complex and geographically constrained border areas. Qualitative research is considered appropriate for exploring phenomena that involve organizational behavior, operational processes, and contextual dynamics that cannot be adequately measured through quantitative indicators alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019). The research was conducted in the Indonesia–Malaysia land border area on the island of Kalimantan, which constitutes one of Indonesia's most strategic and vulnerable border regions. Data collection focused on military operational environments under the responsibility of the Indonesian Army, particularly units involved in border security operations. The study involved several key institutions and actors, including the Operations Assistant of Kodam VI/Mulawarman, Border Security Task Forces (*Satuan Tugas Pengamanan Perbatasan*), District Military Commands (*Kodim*), and selected community leaders residing in border areas. These locations and informants were chosen purposively based on their relevance to UAV deployment and border security implementation.

The subjects of the research consisted of military personnel and stakeholders directly involved in planning, implementing, and supporting border security operations. Informants included commanding officers, operational staff, UAV operators, and territorial officers, as well as civilian community representatives who interact with border security forces. The object of the research was the utilization of UAV technology in border security operations, particularly its contribution to surveillance effectiveness, early detection capability, and tactical decision-making, as well as the constraints and challenges affecting its implementation. Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured guidelines to allow flexibility while maintaining focus on key research questions related to UAV effectiveness, operational constraints, and optimization strategies. This technique enabled the researcher to capture experiential insights, perceptions, and professional judgments from informants who possess direct operational knowledge (Miles et al., 2014). Field observations were carried out to examine the practical use of UAVs, patrol patterns, coordination mechanisms, and operational environments in border areas. Observations provided contextual data to complement interview findings and enhance the validity of the analysis. Document analysis was conducted on official military reports, operational guidelines, policy documents, and relevant regulations to support data triangulation and contextual understanding.

To ensure data validity and reliability, this study applied triangulation techniques by cross-checking information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Triangulation is essential in qualitative research to minimize subjectivity and enhance the credibility of findings through the convergence of multiple data sources (Denzin, 2017). Data processing involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, following the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman. Relevant data were systematically categorized based on research focus areas, including effectiveness indicators, operational challenges, and strategic optimization aspects. Data analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically by linking empirical findings with theoretical frameworks, particularly organizational effectiveness theory and strategic theory. The effectiveness of UAV utilization was analyzed using dimensions of outcome, process, and organizational structure to assess how UAV technology contributes to operational performance, coordination mechanisms, and institutional readiness. Furthermore, strategic analysis was guided by the framework of ends, ways, and means to evaluate the alignment between operational objectives, methods of UAV deployment, and available resources. This analytical approach enabled the formulation of evidence-based strategic recommendations for optimizing UAV utilization in border security operations.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted in the Indonesia–Malaysia land border area on the island of Kalimantan and involved military operational units responsible for border security under the Indonesian Army. The research findings are presented based on empirical data obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis involving the Operations Assistant of Kodam VI/Mulawarman, Border Security Task Forces (*Satuan Tugas Pengamanan Perbatasan*), District Military Commands (*Kodim*), and community representatives in border areas.

Effectiveness of UAV Utilization in Border Security Operations

The findings indicate that the utilization of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) technology has contributed significantly to improving the effectiveness of land border security operations. UAVs were primarily used to support aerial surveillance, monitor remote and difficult terrain, and detect suspicious activities along unofficial border routes. The deployment of UAVs enabled border security units to obtain real-time visual information, which enhanced situational awareness and supported faster tactical decision-making at the operational level. Field data show that UAVs were particularly effective in monitoring dense forest areas, mountainous terrain, and river corridors that are difficult to reach through conventional ground patrols. UAV-assisted surveillance contributed to early detection of illegal cross-border activities, including smuggling routes, illegal crossings, and activities related to illegal logging. This capability strengthened the operational reach of Border Security Task Forces by complementing land patrols and reducing information gaps in remote areas. In addition, UAV utilization supported command elements in coordinating patrol movements and allocating personnel more efficiently. Visual data transmitted from UAVs were used as supporting intelligence for operational briefings and situational updates, enabling commanders to respond more quickly to emerging threats. These findings demonstrate that UAV technology plays a strategic role in enhancing surveillance coverage and operational responsiveness in border security missions.

Operational Constraints and Challenges in UAV Implementation

Despite its operational benefits, the research findings reveal that the effectiveness of UAV utilization has not yet reached an optimal level. Several constraints were identified during data collection. One of the primary challenges relates to human resource limitations, particularly the availability of trained and certified UAV operators. The number of personnel with adequate technical competence to operate UAV systems remains limited, which restricts the frequency and duration of UAV deployment in border operations. Infrastructure and supporting facilities were also identified as significant constraints. In several border locations, the availability of operational infrastructure such as launch and recovery areas, maintenance facilities, reliable power supply, and stable communication networks was insufficient. These limitations affected UAV endurance, data transmission quality, and operational continuity. Environmental factors, including adverse weather conditions and difficult terrain, further influenced UAV operational performance. Logistical and budgetary constraints were another major finding. UAV maintenance, spare parts availability, and system upgrades were constrained by limited logistical support and budget allocation. As a result, UAV deployment was often conducted on a limited scale and could not be sustained continuously throughout the entire operational area. These constraints created gaps between the potential capabilities of UAV technology and its actual implementation in the field.

Institutional and Organizational Factors Affecting UAV Utilization

The research results also highlight institutional and organizational factors influencing UAV effectiveness. UAV operations were not yet fully integrated into the command and control structure of border security operations. In practice, UAV deployment was often treated as a supporting activity rather than an integral component of operational planning. This condition affected coordination between UAV operators, patrol units, and command elements at various levels. Furthermore, standard operating procedures related to UAV utilization were not uniformly implemented across all operational units. Differences in operational readiness, training standards, and technical support among units resulted in varying levels of UAV effectiveness. These organizational dynamics influenced how UAV-generated information was utilized in operational decision-making processes.

Strategic Findings Related to UAV Optimization

The findings indicate that UAV utilization has strategic value in strengthening border security when aligned with operational objectives and available resources. Empirical data show that UAV effectiveness increases when supported by trained personnel, adequate infrastructure, and integrated command systems. The research also found that collaboration with local communities provided additional situational information that complemented UAV surveillance, particularly in identifying high-risk areas and patterns of illegal activity. Overall, the research results demonstrate that UAV technology has positively contributed to improving surveillance capability, early detection, and operational coordination in land border security operations. However, the level of effectiveness remains constrained by human resource capacity, infrastructure readiness, logistical support, and institutional integration. These findings form the empirical basis for further discussion and strategic analysis regarding the optimization of UAV utilization in border security operations.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the utilization of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) technology has a meaningful impact on enhancing the effectiveness of land border security operations along the Indonesia–Malaysia border. Empirically, UAV deployment strengthens early detection capability, real-time aerial surveillance, and tactical decision-making processes. These findings align with the organizational effectiveness framework, particularly the dimensions of outcome, process, and structure, which emphasize that effectiveness is not solely determined by outputs, but also by the quality of operational processes and institutional arrangements (Steers, 1985; Scott, 2003). From the outcome perspective, UAV-assisted surveillance improves operational results by expanding monitoring coverage in remote and difficult terrain that cannot be effectively reached through conventional ground patrols. The ability of UAVs to provide real-time visual intelligence enables faster identification of illegal cross-border activities such as smuggling, illegal crossings, and environmental crimes. This supports previous studies highlighting UAV effectiveness in enhancing situational awareness and operational responsiveness in border security contexts (Firmandes & Yuwono, 2017;

Wibowo, 2021). In this regard, UAVs function as a force multiplier that increases operational reach without proportionally increasing personnel deployment. From the process dimension, the findings reveal that UAV technology contributes positively to operational coordination and information flow. UAV-generated data supports commanders in planning patrol movements, allocating resources, and responding to emerging threats more efficiently. However, the study also demonstrates that process effectiveness remains constrained by limited operator competence, inconsistent standard operating procedures, and insufficient integration of UAV operations within the broader command and control system. This supports the argument that technological capability alone is insufficient without adequate procedural integration and human resource readiness (Robbins & Coulter, 2018; Saragih, 2020).

In terms of organizational structure, the study indicates that UAV utilization has not yet been fully institutionalized within border security operations. UAV units are often treated as auxiliary elements rather than integral components of operational planning and execution. This structural limitation reduces the potential impact of UAV technology and creates dependency on individual initiative rather than systematic deployment. Such findings resonate with Yusuf (2022), who emphasizes that institutional readiness and structural alignment are critical determinants of successful military technology adoption. When analyzed through Arthur F. Lykke Jr.'s strategic framework, the imbalance between ends, ways, and means becomes evident. The strategic objective (ends) of achieving effective and adaptive border security is clear, and UAV deployment represents an appropriate operational method (ways). However, limitations in trained personnel, infrastructure, logistics, and budgetary support indicate that available resources (means) have not yet matched strategic ambitions. According to Lykke, such imbalance increases strategic risk and undermines operational sustainability. This study empirically demonstrates how resource constraints directly affect the operational effectiveness of UAV-based border security strategies.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce the relevance of Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) theory, which underscores the transformative role of advanced technology in modern military operations. UAVs represent a shift toward technology-driven surveillance and intelligence systems that enhance adaptability and reduce personnel exposure to high-risk environments (Putra, 2019). However, the study highlights that RMA-driven transformation requires not only technological acquisition but also doctrinal adaptation, organizational restructuring, and continuous capacity building. Without these supporting elements, technological innovation risks becoming underutilized. Another important insight from this study is the complementary role of local community engagement in enhancing UAV effectiveness. Community-based information helped identify high-risk zones and patterns of illegal activity, which, when combined with UAV surveillance, improved operational accuracy. This finding supports broader security governance perspectives that emphasize civil–military cooperation as a critical component of border security effectiveness (Subagyo, 2021). It also suggests that UAV technology should be embedded within a holistic security approach that integrates technological, institutional, and societal dimensions. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that UAV technology has proven its strategic value in strengthening land border security operations, particularly in challenging geographical contexts such as the Indonesia–Malaysia border. Nevertheless, its effectiveness remains contingent upon human resource capacity, infrastructure readiness, institutional integration, and strategic balance. These findings contribute to defense and security scholarship by providing empirical evidence on how emerging military technologies function within real operational and organizational settings, rather than idealized technological frameworks.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the utilization of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) technology has a significant role in supporting the effectiveness of land border security operations along the Indonesia–Malaysia border. UAVs contribute to improved early detection, expanded surveillance coverage, and faster tactical decision-making, particularly in geographically challenging areas that are difficult to reach through conventional patrol methods. However, the effectiveness of UAV utilization has not yet been fully optimized due to limitations in trained human resources, inadequate supporting infrastructure, restricted logistical and budgetary support, and the absence of full institutional integration within the command and control system. These conditions indicate that the effectiveness of UAV-based border security is determined not only by technological capability, but also by organizational readiness, resource availability, and strategic alignment. This study is limited to a qualitative analysis within specific operational areas and does not quantitatively measure operational performance outcomes, which opens opportunities for future research to adopt mixed-method or comparative approaches across different border regions. Further studies are also recommended to examine long-term UAV integration models, interoperability with other surveillance systems, and policy-level frameworks to support sustainable border security modernization.

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