

# Military Operations for Law Enforcement. Joint Operation of the Army Special Forces Command and the Police during the “Nemangkawi” Operation in Papua 2018

## Військові операції з підтримання правопорядку. Спільна операція Командування сил спеціального призначення армії та поліції під час операції “Немангкаві” в Папуа, 2018 рік

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**Purpose.** to analyze the strategy and tactics of the Indonesian Army Special Forces Command (Kopassus) within the Nemangkawi Task Force during joint operations with the National Police of Indonesia, focusing on counterinsurgency measures against the Papuan separatist armed group (KKSБ).

**Method.** The research employs a qualitative approach based on a collective case study method. Data sources include official documents, academic publications, interviews with task force members, and analytical materials concerning the activities of KKSБ. The analysis covers the three operational phases of the Nemangkawi Task Force (2018–2022).

**Findings.** The results demonstrate that KKSБ posed a significant threat to Indonesian sovereignty by employing violent tactics such as killings, ambushes, hostage-taking, and propaganda about alleged human rights violations. Kopassus involvement initially improved operational effectiveness, though results declined as KKSБ adapted its strategies. The dual nature of the operations—military and law enforcement—required high-level coordination between the army and the police. Weaknesses included limited trust from the local population, civilian casualties, and KKSБ's effective international propaganda efforts.

**Practical implications.** The findings can be applied to improve joint army–police counterinsurgency operations, design personnel training models to minimize losses, and strengthen information policies against separatist propaganda. This case may also serve as a practical model for military education institutions in Indonesia and other countries facing similar challenges.

**Originality/value.** The article provides one of the few comprehensive examinations of the Nemangkawi Operation as an example of hybrid military–law enforcement activity. It contributes to the understanding of counterinsurgency operations in Southeast Asia and offers new insights into the integration of military and police strategies in combating separatism.

**Paper type.** Applied nature.

**Мета дослідження.** аналіз стратегії та тактики Командування сил спеціальних операцій армії Індонезії (Kopassus) у складі оперативної групи «Немангкаві» під час спільних операцій із Національною поліцією, спрямованих на боротьбу з повстанськими угрупованнями (KKSБ) у Папуа.

**Метод дослідження.** застосовано якісний метод дослідження із використанням підходу колективного *case study*. Джерельну базу становили офіційні документи, наукові публікації, інтерв'ю з учасниками операцій та аналітичні матеріали щодо діяльності KKSБ. Методологія ґрунтувалася на аналізі досвіду проведення трьох фаз операції «Немангкаві» (2018–2022 рр.).

**Результати дослідження.** Встановлено, що KKSБ становить реальну загрозу суверенітету Індонезії, використовуючи терористичні методи: убивства, напади на військові пости, захоплення заручників, пропаганду про «порушення прав людини». Доведено, що участь Kopassus у складі оперативної групи підвищила ефективність правоохоронних операцій на початкових етапах, але у подальшому результативність знижувалася через адаптацію тактики KKSБ.

**Практична цінність дослідження.** Результати можуть бути використані: для вдосконалення спільних дій армії та поліції у контрповстанських операціях; для розробки моделей підготовки персоналу та стратегії зменшення втрат; для посилення інформаційної політики проти пропаганди сепаратистів; як практичний кейс для військових навчальних закладів Індонезії та інших країн, що мають подібні виклики.

**Цінність дослідження.** Стаття є однією з небагатьох робіт, що комплексно описує досвід операції «Немангкаві» як приклад гібридної військово-поліцейської діяльності. Дослідження розширює знання про специфіку контрповстанських операцій у Південно-Східній Азії, які залишаються маловисвітленими в міжнародній літературі.

**Тип статті.** Прикладного характеру.

**Key words:** counterinsurgency, Nemangkawi Operation, Kopassus, law enforcement, Papua conflict, hybrid threats.

**Ключові слова:** боротьба з повстанцями, операція Немангкаві, Копассус, правоохоронні органи, конфлікт у Папуа, гібридні загрози.

## Introduction

The Papuan separatist movement, in legal terminology, is referred to as the Armed Criminal Separatist Group (KKSBB Papua). To address the increasing intensity of KKSBB activities in 2018, the Government of Indonesia established a Special Law Enforcement Task Force composed of the Indonesian National Police and the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) (Ikhsal, 2021). Task Force Nemangkawi 1 managed to disrupt KKSBB operations by overrunning seven remote jungle bases, neutralizing several key figures, and seizing weapons. For several months thereafter, the overall security situation in Papua improved. However, KKSBB soon resumed active operations, targeting both security forces and civilians (Gumelar & Nachrawi, 2022), resulting in increased personnel and material losses on the part of the Task Force. The strategy and tactics used by Nemangkawi 1 did not achieve the same level of success in subsequent phases, highlighting the need for more effective strategic adjustments to safeguard the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) (Gumelar & Nachrawi, 2022).

KKSBB Papua, also known as the Free Papua Movement (OPM), was formed in 1963 (Febrianti et al., 2019). Its forerunner was the Papua Volunteer Corps (PVC), established by the Dutch to resist Indonesian military operations in West Irian. Trained by the Dutch army, the PVC fought against Indonesia during Operation Trikora (Ervianto, 2019). The PVC, educated and equipped by the Dutch, rejected the results of the Act of Free Choice (Pepera), which had been internationally recognized by the United Nations (Mhd, 2020).

On July 1, 1971, Seth Jafeth Roemkoreem and Jacob Hendrik Prai declared the independence of West Papua, raising the Morning Star flag and singing the anthem "*O my land Papua*" (Herlambang, 2020). On March 26, 1973, the OPM established the West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB), and a few years later Goliath Tabuni was appointed Commander-in-Chief with the rank of General. OPM militants repeatedly created security disturbances. In 1976 they threatened PT Freeport Indonesia by cutting slurry and fuel pipelines, disrupting telephone and power lines, and setting fire to warehouses and facilities. In 1982, OPM formed the Revolutionary Council (OPMRC) under Moses Woror, which sought independence through international diplomacy via non-aligned forums, the South Pacific, and ASEAN (Damarjati, 2019). At the political level, OPM was represented abroad by Benny Wenda, who obtained British citizenship and resided in Oxford despite lacking support from the military wing TPNPB.

The coexistence of violent insurgency and political separatist movements poses a real threat to Indonesia's territorial integrity. Such insurgency requires counterinsurgency operations (Wibowo et al., 2011). While the use of the term OPM (Free Papua Organization) carries diplomatic advantages for separatists, the Indonesian authorities sought to diminish its international legitimacy by replacing it with the label Armed Criminal Group (KKB), though this limited TNI's legal scope of involvement.

In 2017, Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs Wiranto introduced a new designation: the Armed Criminal Separatist Group (KKSBB) (Putra, 2017). According to Wiranto, this unified terminology replaced the previous labels—Armed Criminal Group (KKB) and Free Papua Organization (OPM). KKSBB refers to groups that commit crimes, terrorize, and harass the population using firearms, thereby engaging in insurgency or separatist activities aimed at secession from Indonesia (Kominfo, 2019). This terminology provided a legal framework for TNI involvement in countering armed violence in Papua.

On August 2018, the TNI Commander and the Chief of Police established a Special Joint Task Force (Satgasus TNI–Polri) named Nemangkawi, with the primary mission of conducting law enforcement, intelligence, and territorial operations. The Task Force operated from July 23, 2018, throughout Papua Province to support law enforcement and safeguard security stability.

As its name suggests, the Task Force consisted of both TNI and Police elements under the

command of the Indonesian National Police Chief. Each element was organized into operational commands comprising several task forces. The organizational structure of the Nemangkawi Task Force is illustrated in the following figure.

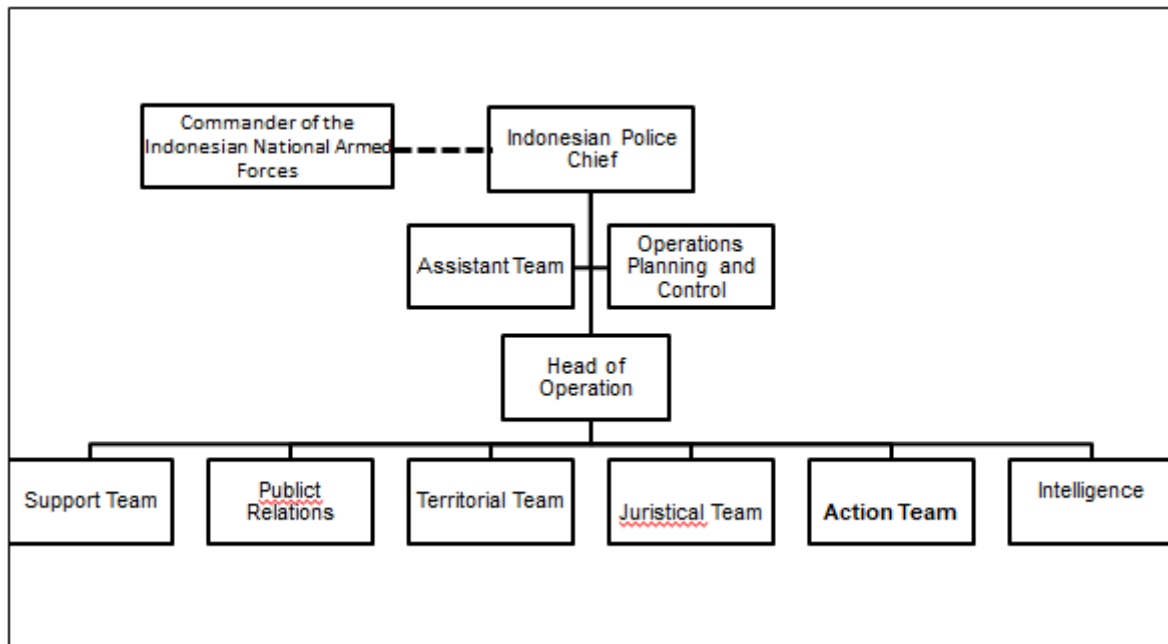


Figure 1 – Structure Organization Nemangkawi

*Source:* processed by the researcher (2021)

Each operational command (Koops) of both the TNI and the Police has task units such as Task Force Support, Territorial, Public Relations, Legal, Operations, and Intelligence. In carrying out field activities, these units may work jointly or conduct separate operations according to the agreements made in TNI–Polri coordination meetings. Personnel in TNI Koops primarily originate from the Special Forces units. The organizational structure is not fixed; it may be adjusted in response to evolving operational needs. Nemangkawi 1 and Nemangkawi 2 completed their assignments, and as of June 2020, Nemangkawi 3 was conducting its mission in Papua.

Before deployment, personnel assigned to Task Force Nemangkawi underwent several preparatory stages, including selection, organization, and training. During the selection phase, candidates submitted by Special Forces units were evaluated for health, physical fitness, psychological stability, and mental resilience. Personnel deemed fit for duty were classified as ready, while those with limitations were reassigned according to the standards and needs of the Task Force. All personnel were assigned based on their specialization and skills and attended a 12-day training program at the Kopassus Education and Training Center (Pusdiklatpassus) before deployment to Papua.

### ***Theoretical background***

Before proceeding further, it is essential to review previous studies of similar incidents conducted in different contexts and time periods. Examining these works enriches understanding and increases the effectiveness of the present research. The results also provide meaningful contributions that can be more widely applied and positively impact the units that rely on such findings.

The first relevant study was conducted by Mohd Farid bin Abd Hamid in 2018, entitled *“Counterinsurgency Operations by the Malaysian Army in Response to Communist Party Threats during the Second Emergency (1968–1989) to Achieve National Security.”* This study analyzed how the Malaysian government confronted the insurgency of the Communist Party of Malaya. The

rebellion employed guerrilla warfare strategies, attempting to compensate for weaknesses by mobilizing resources and local support against the legitimate government. However, Malaysia implemented the KESBAN approach, which successfully countered the insurgency by combining military operations to pursue rebel groups with civic programs aimed at separating insurgents from the population and winning the hearts and minds of the people (Hamid, 2018). This research is relevant to the present study because it provides lessons on how Task Force Nemangkawi established operational success standards and used them to prepare troops for effective missions.

The second study was conducted by Darman Fauzan Dhahir in 2019, entitled *“The Image of Indonesia in OPM Propaganda: Cases of Assaults on Civilians in Nduga Regency.”* This work examined how the Free Papua Movement (OPM) carried out violent attacks against both indigenous Papuans and migrants, as well as security forces, and then manipulated these incidents through propaganda by reversing the facts on the ground (Dhahir, 2019). KKSBB sought to portray the Indonesian government as committing human rights violations by distributing photos of victims of armed violence. They also exploited the misconduct of careless security personnel and used historically symbolic dates to attract public attention. This research is relevant for understanding how the Nemangkawi Task Force anticipated propaganda and patterns of OPM/KKSBB activity, enabling the Task Force to design training and preventive measures (Dhahir, 2019).

The third relevant study was conducted by Georgy Mishael, Joko Setiyono, and Soekotjo Hardiwinoto in 2016, entitled *“The Policy of the Indonesian National Armed Forces in Operations Against the Free Papua Organization from the Perspective of International Humanitarian Law.”* This study examined how Indonesia’s military actions in suppressing OPM armed violence complied with legal frameworks, particularly Law No. 34 of 2004, Article 7(2), concerning the armed resolution of separatist movements (Mishael et al., 2016). The 1949 Geneva Conventions, ratified by Indonesia through Law No. 59 of 1958, provide legal authority for Indonesia to conduct military operations against OPM, while also requiring adherence to humanitarian law. Since the Papuan insurgency is strongly associated with alleged human rights violations, this study is highly relevant to the mental and legal preparedness of soldiers assigned to the Task Force, ensuring that they operate within the law and avoid human rights abuses (Mishael et al., 2016).

## **Data and methods**

According to Sugiyono’s theory (2011), the researchers employed a qualitative research method. One approach within qualitative research is the collective case study, which examines events that occur during specific operations—in this case, the Nemangkawi operation. A case study is defined as a particular event bounded by context, although the distinction between the event and its context is often only partially clear. This study was conducted within the Special Forces Unit, focusing on the personnel and preparation of the Nemangkawi Task Force.

The research subjects were personnel involved in preparing the TNI Operational Command under the Nemangkawi Task Force. The selected informants were task force members who directly participated in field operations and experienced the outcomes of the unit’s activities. These included the Commander of the Operational Command Task Unit of the Nemangkawi Task Force, the Commander of the Field Action Task Force under the TNI Koops Nemangkawi, and the Kopassus Operations Commander, who played a role in planning and preparing the TNI Operational Command integrated into the Nemangkawi Task Force.

## **Results**

### **1. Actual Threat of KKSBB to the Sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI)**

The threats faced today include military, non-military, and hybrid threats that are expected to continue in the coming years, originating both domestically and from abroad (RI, 2015). Among the most significant threats are armed insurgency and armed separatism. An armed insurgency seeks

to oppose or overthrow a legitimate government. In the case of Papua, the persistent actions of KKSB, which repeatedly carry out armed attacks and create public unrest, can even attract international attention. This situation threatens the integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia. If the state fails to confront and resolve KKSB actions, it could signal that Indonesia's sovereignty over Papua is weakened, potentially leading to the detachment of Papua from the unitary framework of NKRI.

The threat of armed separatism is closely related to armed rebellion, with the main difference lying in the ultimate goal. Separatist movements aim to break away from the Republic of Indonesia, seeking sovereignty and independence for a particular region or community. Such movements are usually driven by nationalism or religious motivations.

In responding to threats from KKSB, close attention must also be paid to proxy wars, in which external actors may finance and support KKSB activities for their own national interests. Addressing this challenge requires coordinated operations by the security forces as well as the participation of all components of the nation. The roots of separatism stem from racial differences, economic and social disparities, uneven development, and efforts to marginalize or discredit the indigenous population. These factors have fueled the separatist sentiment underlying KKSB's political movement.

Armed violence has persisted for decades. Since Papua's reintegration into Indonesia, KKSB's armed actions have continuously disturbed public order. In 1970, KKSB—also known as the Free Papua Movement (OPM)—formed the National Liberation Army (TPN). Their separatist activities escalated when, on July 1, 1971, they declared the establishment of the Republic of West Papua. They planned to announce this declaration internationally in July 1972, but the attempt failed due to a lack of community support. Subsequently, Martin Tabu, a TPN/OPM figure, launched an attack on a TNI post in Senggigi, resulting in the deaths of one member of Kodim 1701 and two members of Battalion 753, with four weapons seized. In 1973, Marcus Sam led further attacks, followed by Obert Tabuni in Jayapura in 1974, operations in Serui in 1975, and additional sporadic incursions in Jayapura in 1976 under the leadership of Alex Derey and Jelly Ellaby.

Even after the Nemangkawi law enforcement operation was launched in 2018, KKSB's violent actions have not ceased. Numerous armed incidents have caused casualties among both security forces and indigenous Papuan civilians. Several of KKSB's actions following the Nemangkawi operation are summarized in the following table.

Based on the data above, the acts of armed violence carried out by KKSB clearly have both political and psychological objectives. They are intended to weaken the morale of security officers, who are intimidated one by one. From the perspective of the Police, these are criminal acts; however, the broader objective pursued by KKSB directly threatens national sovereignty. Their methods of action are violent, including attacks on officers, the killing of civilians, hostage-taking, and the symbolic raising of the Morning Star flag.

KKSB continuously escalates its activities to demonstrate its existence, while remaining fragmented into groups with differing agendas. With relatively small forces, they attack poorly defended outposts or security personnel caught off guard. They also kill civilians suspected of being spies or undercover officers. Up to the present, KKSB continues to operate by exploiting time in a manner typical of insurgency warfare—deliberately prolonging conflict in order to exhaust security forces and erode their morale. This protracted strategy creates opportunities for soldiers to become negligent, commit mistakes, and suffer declining combat spirit. Prolonged counterinsurgency operations also place a heavy burden on state finances and deplete human resources.



**Table 1 – Threat current KKSb post Nemangkawi**

#	TIME	THE PLACE	INCIDENT	DESCRIPTION
1	June 22, 2018	Regency Kenya, Papua	KKSb-shot aircraft, Trigana water, and Dimonim water transport bromob	1 pilot was wounded and shot in the back
2	October 2018	Mapenduma, Regency. guess, Papua	16 people hostage, teacher, and a health authority accused of eye Eye	Hostage released after the negation Custom
3	December 1, 2018	Trans-road Papua, Regency Nduga, Indonesia	Massacre of workers at Street Trans Papua PT Istaka site	31 Road Workers Killed Slaughtered KKSb
4	January 18, 2019	District Yambi, Regency Peak Jaya, Papua	Shoot contact TNI/Polri with KKSb group Lekagak Telenggen	1 TNI Fall
5	August 12 2019	Kampung Banish, Kab Peak, Papua	Hostage	1 Police Fall
6	September 16, 2019	Habeme, Jayawijaya Regency, Papua	Attack on member TNI by Group Egianus Kogoya	1 TNI killed
7	Tuesday, September 17 2019	Olenki Village, North Ilaga District, Puncak Regency, Papua	Shooting to Public Ilaga by KKSb	3 inhabitant civil dead
8	December 18, 2019	Intan Jaya, Papua	Contact TNI Police with KKSb	2 TNI Fall
9	September 17, 2020	Hitadipa, district of Intan Jaya Papua	Attack on TNI	2 TNI Fall
10	Friday, 4 June 2021	Nipuralome, District Ilaga, Regency Peak, Papua	Head Village Kago, Denis Wanda, and 9 OAP others report incident shooting against 6 OAP	Three real people dead in Papua
11	December 1, 2021	push, Papua West	Factory Burn P.T. Get up Wood Irian as an action denial development KKSb	nothing victim
12	Thursday, January 27, 2022	Ilaga districts Peak, Papua	Shoot contact TNI/Polri with Numbuk Group Telenggen	2 TNI Fall

**Source:** processed by the researcher (2011)

## 2. Threat Potential KKSb to Sovereignty NKRI

The implementation of law enforcement in Papua has not been fully effective because KKSb still retains significant strength and continues to act violently, both militarily and politically. Persistent acts of violence, left unresolved, undermine the authority of the Indonesian government in the eyes of the Papuan population, the wider Indonesian public, and even the international community. The longer the Papua issue remains unaddressed, the greater the threat posed by KKSb becomes. At the same time, KKSb's political wing exploits the government's weaknesses for propaganda to seek foreign support.

According to Yusvitasari (2019), three elements determine whether a separatist group is likely to gain recognition: (1) the existence of a well-organized structure, (2) the use of clear symbolic identifiers, and (3) dominance over a particular territorial area. In this regard, KKSb has established regional war commands (*Kodap*) led by Commander-in-Chief Goliath Tabuni, uses the Morning Star

flag as its symbol, and maintains a presence across almost all regions of Papua.

On the political front, KKSBB consistently maneuvers to exploit weaknesses in Indonesian governance. Public distrust in law enforcement in Papua, persistent economic underdevelopment in the highlands, and ongoing human rights concerns remain potential flashpoints that could one day explode into a major crisis. Declining public confidence in government erodes state authority and threatens national sovereignty. KKSBB's political wing conducts propaganda both domestically and internationally, and this requires continuous monitoring.

Since Papua's transfer to Indonesia by the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) on May 1, 1963, political turmoil in Papua has never ceased. Numerous organizations emerged, including Genapa (Gerakan Nasionalis Papua), Panapa (Partai Nasional Papua), OPM (Organisasi Papua Merdeka), PPM (Partai Papua Merdeka), GPM (Gerakan Papua Merdeka), IPARI (Ikatan Papua Anti Republik Indonesia), SAMPARI (Semangat Angkatan Muda Papua Anti Republik Indonesia), IRPARI (Ikut Republik Papua Anti Republik Indonesia), and PPGPM (Pimpinan Pusat Gerakan Papua Merdeka).

These organizations maintained activities not only within Papua but also abroad, such as in the Netherlands (Marcus Kaisepo), Senegal (Ben Tanggahama), Papua New Guinea (Eli Mariem), and Sweden (Yakop H. Pray). Their overseas campaigns spread anti-Indonesian propaganda and sought international sympathy by manipulating facts in order to win United Nations support (Operation to Crush the Separatist Movement in Papua 1965–1991, 2018).

Following the reform era of 1998, KKSBB's political activities were increasingly coordinated under Benny Wenda, a convict in the Abepura police station arson case. He later became active under the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP). This organization gathers and disseminates reports accusing Indonesia of human rights violations. Benny Wenda originally acted through the *Koteka Community Consultative Council* (Denmak), which advocated for traditional Papuan rights and rejected Indonesia's special autonomy framework.

On June 6, 2002, Wenda was arrested in Jayapura for involvement in the police station attack. On October 27, 2002, he escaped from prison with the help of a European NGO, fled to Papua New Guinea, and eventually obtained political asylum in the United Kingdom with the support of a New Zealand NGO (Catherine Delahunty). In 2011, Indonesia issued a red notice against him, but it was revoked by Interpol after legal intervention from an Australian lawyer.

Wenda's major international initiatives include establishing the *International Parliamentarians for West Papua (IPWP)*, launched in the UK Parliament in London on October 15, 2008, as a cornerstone of global advocacy against Indonesia's sovereignty in Papua. On December 6, 2014, he co-founded the ULMWP, which coordinates anti-Indonesian activities abroad. On February 4, 2015, Wenda registered West Papua with the *Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG)* and the *African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States (ACP)* in hopes of gaining recognition of Papuan sovereignty. In 2017, nine New Zealand parliamentarians supported a petition advocating for West Papua. Domestically, Wenda maintains links with the *Papua National Committee (KNPB)* and the *Federal Republic of West Papua (NFRPB)* to mobilize Papuan support and highlight alleged Indonesian human rights violations.

The diplomatic strategy relies on KNPB and NFRPB to organize illegal referendums and generate human rights narratives, which Wenda then amplifies internationally through IPWP and ULMWP. Through MSG and ACP platforms, he seeks to raise the Papua issue in international forums, including the United Nations. Indonesia's defense diplomacy must therefore remain vigilant in countering these international efforts (Mhd, 2020).

Between 2014 and 2017, several states and organizations voiced support for West Papuan independence. In March 2014, New Zealand Māori women staged a performance entitled "*Oceania Interrupted Action 3: Free West Papua*." In May 2016, the Westminster Declaration was signed during an IPWP session at the UK Parliament. In December 2016, the Prime Minister of Vanuatu

called for an end to human rights violations against indigenous Papuans. In March 2017, seven Pacific states—Vanuatu, Tonga, Palau, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Solomon Islands—accused Indonesia of human rights violations at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. In May 2017, eleven members of New Zealand’s Green Party signed the Westminister Declaration (tiro.id, 2017).

## Conclusion

The strategy of the Special Forces in preparing Task Force Nemangkawi for law enforcement operations in Papua is essential for safeguarding Indonesia’s sovereignty. KKSBB’s actual and potential threats to the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) remain evident in Papua. Without proper handling, these threats could seriously endanger national unity and even risk detaching Papua from the NKRI. KKSBB’s armed violence against the Papuan community and security apparatus—including murders, robberies, rapes, hostage-taking, and attacks on posts—has caused significant losses for the Indonesian state. Infrastructure development in Papua has been severely hampered, as workers are afraid to continue construction, while completed projects such as buildings, roads, and bridges are often damaged by KKSBB attacks.

At the same time, potential threats persist in the form of declining public trust in law enforcement, deep economic inequality, and recurring allegations of human rights violations, all of which undermine government authority in the eyes of Papuans. Public fear for personal security further fuels KKSBB propaganda, which can be exploited internationally to intensify pressure for Papuan independence.

The strategy for preparing the TNI Operations Command in support of Task Force Nemangkawi to safeguard the sovereignty of NKRI can be analyzed in terms of goals, resources, and methods.

- **Goals (Ends):** To ensure that each replacement of the Task Force can carry out its duties effectively, raise awareness among personnel, and face KKSBB separatist actions with minimal losses among both Task Force members and civilians.
- **Resources (Means):** The Task Force is composed of Kopassus personnel with operational experience and knowledge of Papua. They are equipped with unit-level and individual gear suited to the operational environment, supported by education and training centers, and reinforced by specialized units outside Kopassus.
- **Methods (Ways):** Synchronization of Kopassus training activities with pre-deployment preparation, allowing sufficient time for comprehensive readiness to address all forms of threats in the operational area. This includes careful selection of personnel, determination of operational areas, and provision of intelligence data to be used in practical training.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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