

Admiral Malahayati: The Role of Women in Maritime Defense

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Abstract: Admiral Malahayati, a female figure in the history of the Aceh Sultanate, played a significant role in defending regional sovereignty from colonial threats in the late 16th century. This study explores Malahayati's contribution to naval warfare strategies and community participation, especially war widows, in defense efforts. Using a qualitative approach and theories of maritime war and general warfare, this study analyzes how Malahayati utilized community support and local resources to build an effective military force. The entry of Inong Balee (widows) troops who lost their husbands in the conflict gave a new dimension to the concept of maritime resilience. They not only played a role as logistical support but were also actively involved in the resistance against the invaders. Using the principle of civil society involvement expressed by Reznikova, this study shows that civil society participation, especially the active role of women, is an important element in maintaining a country's sovereignty. The results of this study highlight the importance of integrating the roles of women and society in defense strategies, as well as the significance of Malahayati's history in the context of modern debates about community involvement in national defense, especially among women. These findings are expected to provide new insights into women's contributions to Indonesian military

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history and open new discussions about national resilience in the face of contemporary threats.

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INTRODUCTION

Laksamana Malahayati is one of the most prominent female figures in Indonesian military history, who was instrumental in defending the sovereignty of the Sultanate of Aceh from colonial attacks in the late 16th century. (Saifullah, 2012). In her capacity as a naval leader, Malahayati not only displayed exceptional courage and leadership, but also implemented effective maritime strategies, particularly in the face of larger powers such as the Portuguese and the Dutch.

Her full name is Keumalahayati, born into a noble Acehnese family. Her father, Admiral Mahmud Syah, and her grandfather, Admiral Muhammad Said Syah, were also important figures in the Royal Aceh Navy. Malahayati's maritime spirit was instilled since childhood which was supported by her family background. Coupled with her educational background, she attended the Mahad Baitul Makdis Military Academy of the Sultanate of Aceh, which was supervised by military experts from Turkey.(Saifullah, 2012). At this academy, she developed her skills in the military, especially in the navy, and eventually became one of the outstanding female cadets. Her dreams and aspirations of becoming an admiral followed the death of her husband in the battle against the Portuguese in Aru Bay. Malahayati was a strong woman, after grieving she was moved to avenge the death of her husband and the soldiers who died in battle against the Portuguese troops. Malahayati then asked Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah al-Mukammil to form a fleet whose soldiers consisted of widows whose husbands died in war, including herself. The Sultan granted her request and gave full authority to Malahayati to lead the fleet.

This force became known as the *Armada Inong Balee* (widow's army). The troops initially consisted of 1,000 young widows whose husbands had died on the battlefield. Malahayati trained and led them with strict military discipline. The number of troops later increased to 2,000, of which most were widows, while the rest were young girls inspired by Malahayati's bravery (Saifullah, 2012). (Saifullah, 2012). Malahayati and her troops made Krueng Raya Bay their main base. Around this bay, Malahayati built Fort *Inong Balee*, which is located on a hill with a height of about 100 meters from sea level. The fort was

equipped with cannon holes that led directly to the bay's door, allowing them to watch and defend the area from sea attacks.

As commander of the Aceh Kingdom's sea power, Malahayati trained widows in various war strategies, operating ships, and using weapons, including cannons. Although most of them were widows grieving the loss of their husbands, under Malahayati's leadership, they were transformed into a formidable force that was respected on the battlefield. This army was not only a symbol of the strength of women in Acehnese society, but also proof that they were capable of playing an important role in the defense of the country. One of the most famous moments in the history of Malahayati's leadership and the *Inong Balee* Fleet was when they successfully conquered the Dutch fleet led by Cornelis de Houtman in 1599. When the Dutch fleet betrayed the Kingdom of Aceh, Malahayati and her troops launched a surprise attack. In the battle, Malahayati directly killed Cornelis de Houtman, while *Inong Balee's* troops managed to detain Cornelis' brother, Frederick de Houtman, who was later imprisoned for two years. These successes proved not only Malahayati's military capabilities, but also the strength of the *Inong Balee* Fleet she led. This force, made up entirely of women, became one of the most respected naval fleets in Southeast Asia at the time (Saifullah, 2012). (Saifullah, 2012).

In the context of naval warfare, the strategies adopted by weaker powers often focus on sea denial and strategic defense rather than direct confrontation with larger powers. As Milan Vego explains, "in times of peace as well as war, the weaker side at sea is usually strategically defensive, often seeking to avoid direct confrontation with a stronger sea power by using sea denial methods to undermine the opponent's control over critical maritime areas". (Milan Vego, 2019). This strategy is seen in the actions of Admiral Malahayati who successfully defended the Strait of Malacca, one of the most strategic maritime routes in the world through effective tactics, despite facing the far militarily superior Portuguese, Dutch and British forces.

Sea denial, as outlined by Vego, "is not only about preventing enemy control of the sea, but also about capitalizing on geographic advantages, disrupting enemy supply lines, and weakening enemy sea power over time." (Milan Vego, 2019). Aceh's strategic position in the narrow waters of the Strait of Malacca gave Malahayati a natural advantage in disrupting enemy operations and cutting off their sea lines of communication. Favorable landscapes can provide natural defenses and opportunities to undermine enemy operations, especially in narrow waters or busy sea traffic flow points such as the Strait of Malacca. (Saifullah, 2012). By mastering this strategic position, Malahayati was able to deny the enemy full control of the region.

In addition, Admiral Malahayati also used the strategy of avoiding decisive battles, which is in accordance with what Vego explained "Weaker naval forces might avoid decisive battles, choosing to engage in wars of attrition, weakening a stronger enemy over time while minimizing

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their own risk." (Milan Vego, 2019). This strategy allowed Malahayati to prolong the conflict and weaken the enemy gradually, without having to take great risks in frontal combat.

By combining effective defensive strategies and optimal utilization of strategic landscape conditions, Laksamana Malahayati managed to provide significant resistance to larger colonial powers. A deeper analysis of Admiral Malahayati's role in defending the maritime territory of the Sultanate of Aceh will be explored, as well as the implications of her maritime strategy in the context of naval warfare theory.

Not only as a war leader with a mature strategy, Malahayati was also recognized as an accomplished diplomat. He was able to take advantage of the complexity of international relations at that time, especially in maintaining relations with foreign powers such as England. In 1602, he negotiated with James Lancaster, an envoy from Queen Elizabeth I, who brought a request for trade relations between England and the Sultanate of Aceh. Before meeting Lancaster with the Sultan, Malahayati put forward the condition that the British must commit to opposing the Portuguese, a common enemy for Aceh and England. This tactic demonstrated Malahayati's ability to use diplomacy to assert her position and protect the Sultanate's interests.

Malahayati's diplomatic strategy has similarities with the concept of gunboat diplomacy, a form of coercive diplomacy that uses military threats to influence the policies of the opposing party. This concept is known in the maritime world as "the use or threat of limited sea power, not as an act of war, to achieve advantage or avoid disadvantage" (Cable in Maulana, 2022). Maulana, 2022). Although the concept of formal gunboat diplomacy only developed in the 19th century, Malahayati's approach in dealing with the British and the Dutch shows a similar pattern. He combined military power with strategic diplomacy, highlighting Aceh's strengths so that the British understood Aceh's position as a strong and independent maritime power. (Maulana, 2022).

The third deepening is related to the involvement of Malahayati and the *Inong Balee* troops in the maritime defense of the Sultanate of Aceh at that time. In line with Clausewitz's idea of universal warfare, civil society plays an important role in large-scale conflicts. A deeper understanding of how people's involvement in warfare is crucial is possible. Clausewitz stated, "While a single citizen in a theater of operations usually has no significant influence on the war, the collective influence of a country's population cannot be ignored." (Clausewitz, 1984). This shows that the collectivity of support from the people of Aceh for Malahayati's struggle was crucial in maintaining sovereignty.

Clausewitz also highlighted the importance of voluntary collaboration from the public in supporting the war effort. "Voluntary collaboration born of sincere attachment is always very valuable; in particular, it will always exist when no real sacrifice is involved" (Clausewitz, 1984). In this context, the support of an organized and committed Acehnese community became a decisive factor in the resistance against the

Portuguese and Dutch sea powers of the time. Through this action and collaboration, Malahayati was able to mobilize Aceh's military potential with the support of her people, especially widows whose husbands died fighting, making war not only a military affair but also a collective struggle.

By utilizing community support, Laksamana Malahayati managed to provide significant resistance to the larger colonial forces. In detail, we will discuss the ways and roles of Admiral Malahayati in defending the maritime territory of the Sultanate of Aceh, as well as the implications of her maritime strategy in the context of universal war theory.

This is also reinforced by Reznikova's Whole Society Approach theories which say "civil society involvement in resilience is important, as the participation of the public, civil society, and local authorities is necessary in implementing resilience measures and strengthening security". (Reznikova, 2021). The widows' contributions highlight the importance of non-state actors' involvement in national defense, where they become an integral part of the larger defense effort.

In the midst of challenging circumstances, widows left behind by their war dead husbands served as symbols of community resilience. They demonstrate that "national resilience requires the collective efforts of society to survive and adapt to crises. Resilience is not only about the state's response, but also involves the capacities of communities and individuals" (Reznikova, 2021). By organizing themselves into defense groups, these widows not only defended their territory, but also built solidarity and strengthened the fighting spirit of the Acehnese people.

Through this collective action, Admiral Malahayati was able to mobilize Aceh's military potential with the support of her people, making war not only a military affair, but also a collective struggle.

In a similar study that discusses the role of women in national resilience, especially in sectors such as education, economy, social, and culture, Rumbekwan et al. (Rumbekwan et al., 2023). However, this research is still limited to the role of women in development through indirect approaches, such as family and community management. There has been no in-depth discussion of women's contribution to direct national defense, especially their role in the military or physical combat involving territorial defense.

Therefore, research on the role of **Admiral Malahayati in Maritime Defense** is an example of how women can contribute directly to national defense. As leader of the *Inong Balee* Fleet, Malahayati led thousands of widowed warriors in naval battles against the Portuguese and Dutch, making her the first woman in the world to achieve the rank of admiral and command a war fleet. (Saifullah, 2012). Previous research has not touched on this aspect in detail, so further research is needed to reveal the direct contribution of women in the context of military and maritime defense.

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RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach to explore the role and leadership of Admiral Malahayati in the context of defense. Qualitative research methods are based on the philosophy of postpositivism and are used to examine natural object conditions. In this approach, the researcher functions as a key instrument, and data collection techniques are triangulated, which is a combination of various sources and methods to obtain more accurate data. (Sugiyono, 2013).

The type of research applied in this study is a literature study, which focuses on collecting and analyzing written sources related to Laksamana Malahayati, including books, articles, and historical documents. Because, according to Sugiyono "Qualitative research is more descriptive, where the data collected is in the form of words or pictures, and does not emphasize numbers" (Sugiyono, 2013). Data sources in this study include primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources consist of historical documents and military records that directly discuss Admiral Malahayati. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, and other publications that explain military leadership theory and the historical context of Aceh's defense. Qualitative data analysis is inductive, which is an analysis based on the data obtained, and then developed. In this research, the two data sources used are Saifullah's Biography of Admiral Keumalahayati (Saifullah, 2012), which was written in 2012.(Saifullah, 2012) published by the Banda Aceh Center for the Preservation of History and Traditional Values.

The validity of this writing is confirmed by the Remarks of the Head of the Banda Aceh Center for the Preservation of History and Traditional Values Djuman in July 2012 in Banda Aceh, Aceh Province with ISBN 978-602-9457-06-3. While the second data as a form of second opinion is a book entitled "Malahayati Singa Betina from Aceh" written by Adi Pewara with the publisher Karya Anda. This book was published in Surabaya in 1991.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To facilitate the delineation of the discussion, the following are some of the topics covered in the discussion section along with the most relevant theories used by Malahayati in her two biographical documents. There will be at least four key points discussed that will give a full picture of Malahayati and her troops, the *Inong Balee* played an important role in the navy of the Sultanate of Aceh during her time. The first is the war strategy used by Admiral Malahayati, the second is the ingenious defense strategy by building alliances, the third is the direct involvement of widowed women, and the last is the direct use of *Inong Balee* troops as the main non-governmental defense.

Discussion Table 1.1

Sub Discussion	Theoretical Foundation	Explanation
Admiral Malayahati's War Strategy	Sea Denial (Vego 2019).	This strategy involved denying the enemy the use of the sea without taking full control of it. This is what Malahayati did by organizing the position of her troops guarding the sea territory of the Kingdom of Aceh.
Admiral Malahayati's Defense Diplomacy	Preventive Diplomacy, Gunboat Diplomacy (Setiawan, 2016).	Malahayati used Aceh's sea power for intimidation, building alliances with foreigners while avoiding open conflict, maintaining Aceh's stability. Malahayati took preventive measures to avoid conflict by drawing up strategic agreements and alliances, maintaining Aceh's stability.
Involving Women in Maritime Defense	Total War Strategy (Clausewitz, 1984), (Sun Tzu, 2000).	Involving all elements of society, including women, in defense efforts reflects a comprehensive approach to warfare that involves the whole of society.
<i>Inong Balee</i> as a Non-Governmental Defense Force	Whole Society Approach (Reznikova, 2021).	The <i>Inong Balee</i> troops symbolize the involvement of all elements of society, including women, in maintaining national resilience collectively.

These four discussions will be explored using descriptive qualitative methods to illustrate the relevance of biographical documents with theories of war that have been put forward by experts. In addition, various contexts also explain the determination of Laksamana Malahayati in relation to the role and impact of women in the maritime defense of the Sultanate of Aceh in the 16th century. These four sub-themes will provide an explanation of what the role of Admiral Malahayati was and whether it had an impact. Then give emphasis to the women's group, *Inong Balee* or the army of widows who also had a central role in the maritime defense of the Sultanate of Aceh at that time.

1. Admiral Malahayati's War Strategy

As the first female admiral in the world, Malahayati certainly had a qualified war strategy to oversee thousands of warships belonging to the Sultanate of Aceh at that time. As revealed in Adi Perwara's book, there were at least 40 warships with a strength of 10,000 soldiers under her command. Malahayati certainly had tactics so that thousands of lives under his command did not die in vain, and returned home with victory.

The most obvious strategy used by Malahayati in some documentation is *sea denial*, a naval warfare strategy often used to defend the sovereignty of a country's territorial waters in the 19th

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century. Kartikasari defines *sea denial* as a preventive measure to prevent the use of the sea by other parties with a defensive approach.

He explained that *sea denial* is a passive strategy because it has a priority of pressing on the defense and stability of the territory at sea. Defense and this can change indirectly, and still open the possibility of using attack power with the attack capabilities possessed. Being alert or *standby* in the most dangerous conditions can be a reference to how *sea denial* works. (Kartikasari, 2019).

Malahayati did not attack blindly to devour the Malacca region, but the attack was a counterattack to show the strength of the Aceh Sultanate's navy after a fierce battle that resulted in the death of Malahayati's father and husband at the hands of the Portuguese navy. Adi Pewara (1991) mentions, In 1581, Sultan Mansur Syah assigned Malahayati to lead the attack on the La Formosa fort in Malacca. In this massive attack, Malahayati mobilized 40 warships supported by a force of 10,000 Acehese soldiers. As a result, Aceh's sea fleet managed to bulldoze and make the strength of the Portuguese warships nervous. (Adi Pewara, 1991).

Figure.1 Inong Balee fort ruins 2018



Source: Culture.kemdikbud.go.id

Malahayati's action of taking command and launching a swift attack on the Portuguese fleet reflected the principle of *sea denial*, as a proactive response was used to defend Aceh's sea territory at the time. Malahayati's attack was not only to repulse the enemy troops, provide a counterattack, but also to show the strength of the sea troops she led so that the intruders would think twice about returning to Aceh's territorial waters.

Malahayati's combat style is also explained by Vego as a form of implementing *sea denial*. Vego said that in *Sea denial*, defensive tactics can be carried out by utilizing decisive strategic moments to influence the course of battle. He stated, "The essence of *sea denial* is that one's power focuses on preventing and disrupting the enemy's use of the sea rather than attempting to take full control of it." (Milan Vego, 2019). It is clear that Malahayati's strategic moment was the life-saving spirit and battle readiness of the *Inong Balee* soldiers whose husbands were killed by the Portuguese navy.

This reflects the actions of Malahayati who bravely took command in critical conditions, defending Aceh's sovereignty through rapid attacks that disrupted the enemy fleet. In addition, Malahayati's leadership was very clear not to control the Portuguese colony in Malacca, but to repel and disrupt the Portuguese who wanted to control Aceh's sea territory. This is reinforced by the context of Malahayati's attack in the battle against the Portuguese as written by Adi Pewara: "After Rear Admiral Ibrahim died in battle, Malahayati did not allow the sad news to spread among the crew, so that their fighting spirit would not be dampened. She donned her late husband's clothes and bravely took command of the battle. The results were remarkable, three Portuguese ships were sunk, two others were taken prisoner, and one escaped from the siege of Aceh patrol boats." (Adi Pewara, 1991).

Then, in *sea denial* strategy, Kartikasari stated, understanding the sea terrain can provide a significant advantage in impeding enemy movement without having to carry out a full attack. She explained that "in *sea denial*, the *deterrence* aspect of maritime strategy is related to *deterrence*, which is important because the capacity of land forces depends on this aspect before the threat enters the land area." (Kartikasari, 2019). Malahayati was once said to have utilized the conditions of Aceh's waters, which she mastered, to devise attack tactics that were difficult for the enemy to predict.

In addition, Malahayati also built a fort to anticipate attacks from enemy naval fleets in the area around Krueng Raya Bay. This effort was clearly a form of *sea denial* strategy carried out by Malahayati in the face of the sea power of western nations which at that time expanded colonies into the archipelago. "Around Krueng Raya Bay, Admiral Keumalahayati built the *Inong Balee* Fort which is located on a hill about 100 meters above sea level. The wall facing the sea is 3 meters wide with cannon holes whose muzzles point to the bay" (Saifullah, 2012).

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Figure.2 The remaining ruins of Fort Inong Balee located in Lamreh Village, Masjid Raya Sub-district, Aceh Besar District (2022).



Source: Antaranews.com

As Vego said emphasizing the importance of utilizing geographical advantages in *Sea denial* strategy. He argued that, "Utilizing knowledge of local geography and timing the engagement is key in making enemy movement and access difficult." (Milan Vego, 2019).

2. Admiral Malahayati's Defense Diplomacy

In addition to being a formidable admiral, Malahayati was also a clever figure of defense diplomacy. In defense diplomacy, Malahayati explicitly used Aceh's sea power as a deterrent to western countries that intended to harm Aceh. This act of diplomacy is in line with Setiawan's view of military diplomacy, which can be used to "show strength and create a deterrence effect on other countries". (Setiawan, 2016). The context of this diplomacy is recorded in Saifullah's writing, which mentions that when James Lancaster from England arrived in Aceh, Malahayati set a condition that England not ally with the Portuguese, showing a firm defense diplomacy policy to maintain Aceh's stability. (Saifullah, 2012). Malahayati thus signaled Aceh's military capability as a strong diplomatic tool.

Another diplomacy carried out by Malahayati was to build a naval alliance with the British royal troops who at that time were also enemies of the Portuguese empire. When the British navy led by James Lancaster entered the Aceh region, they entered by peaceful means and asked politely for the Sultanate of Aceh to accept them as trading partners for the western world. At that time Malahayati gave conditions, the British had to join in antagonizing the Portuguese who were also enemies of the Aceh Kingdom in controlling the Malacca Strait. This is what Setiawan calls "*Preventive diplomacy* aims to prevent large countries or external powers from getting involved in regional conflicts by resolving tensions through regional diplomatic approaches". (Setiawan, 2016).

Similar diplomacy has also been carried out by Malahayati in her historical record of killing the captain of the Dutch naval forces, Cornelis de Houtman. Admiral Malahayati managed to kill the captain, and took two other important people from the group captive. After the war ended, the crew led by Cornelis de Houtman was tried in the court of the Sultanate of Aceh.

But surprisingly, Malahayati did not necessarily ask for them to be sentenced to death, but instead became the defender of the hostages. Not without reason, Malahayati wanted the Sultan of Aceh to think of diplomacy by utilizing these hostages. Malahayati considered, if Aceh provided leniency, European countries would look up to the wisdom of the Sultanate of Aceh.

"During the trial of the Dutch crew led by Cornelis de Houtman, Admiral Malahayati asked the Sultan of Aceh for permission to be their defender. In her opinion, although the actions of the Dutch were not praiseworthy, the death penalty could strain Aceh's relations with other European countries. He proposed that the death penalty be changed to a life sentence, and his defense was accepted by the court." (Adi Pewara, 1991).

In addition to *preventive diplomacy*, Malahayati also used *gunboat diplomacy* to defend the Aceh Sultanate's sea territory at that time. There was one incident when Malahayati gave a direct threat to the Portuguese because they began to dare to interfere with the sovereignty of Aceh's territory. Malahayati at that time sent a threatening letter to the Portuguese in Malacca. The commander of the *Inong Balee* troops threatened to close the Malacca Strait to Portuguese merchant ships and warships if the Portuguese attack plan was not revoked as soon as possible.

Malahayati did not mess around, the threat he sent at that time was followed up with a search operation of Aceh warships against merchant ships and Portuguese warships sailing in the Malacca Strait. After the raid, the Portuguese governor of Malacca revoked the planned attack on Ternate, as well as providing security to the Aceh sultanate's territorial waters. (Adi Pewara, 1991).

The style of *gunboat diplomacy*, or warship diplomacy is now known as a form of indirect threat that can be called in accordance with the context of the threat carried out by Malahayati. In the 21st century, the United States often did this as mentioned by Setiawan "Gunboat diplomacy was carried out by the United States to make Central and Latin American countries not oppose American politics, especially in its ambition to obtain the territory they considered as 'American destiny.' (Setiawan, 2016). He said, this diplomacy technique is still carried out by the US until the era of new generation wars with modern means such as aircraft carrier fleets, submarines, and other military ships operating and patrolling almost all sea areas in the ocean world. This was prominent when tensions between China and Taiwan escalated. At that time, China conducted military exercises in the Taiwan Strait, the United

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States then immediately sent aircraft carriers to the area around Taiwan as a form of pressure aimed at reducing China's desire to fully control Taiwan.

3. Involving Women in Maritime Defense

Entering the core discussion related to the involvement of women in maritime defense, which in this context is the sea territory of the Sultanate of Aceh. According to Clausewitz, the involvement of the people in total combat becomes a strategic advantage in war, especially when they have a close relationship with the defended territory "The close relationship between the people and the territory gives the defenders an advantage" (Clausewitz, 1984). This was also the origin of the *Inong Balee* army that Malahayati proposed to form. The love for the homeland and the place where these widows established their love is one form of closeness between the people and the region they live in.

Admiral Malahayati, as the commander of Aceh's navy, directly asked the Sultan of Aceh to strengthen his fleet specifically by inviting widows whose husbands had died in battle to join the Aceh military force. Malahayati is said to have promised to take revenge and was determined to continue her husband's struggle even though she was alone, this she said after her husband died in battle. To fulfill this goal, Malahayati asked the Sultan of Aceh to form an Acehnese war fleet whose soldiers were all widows whose husbands died in the Teluk Haru War. "Keumalahayati's request was finally granted by the sultan of Aceh" (Saifullah, 2012).

These *Inong Balee* troops correlate with Clausewitz's assertion that "People's war will provide a new, tangible force through mobilization." (Clausewitz, 1984). The *Inong Balee* troops consisting of women not only functioned as a defense force, but could also become a symbol of people's power, inspiring the people of Aceh to persevere in the face of threats. This strengthened the fighting spirit of the people who saw themselves involved in a non-combatant defense system at that time.

The *Inong Balee* troops are also known for their loyalty in defending the territory of the Sultanate of Aceh, even to the waters of the Strait of Malacca. This is part of Clausewitz's theory of universal warfare. He said that "the full involvement of the people in war creates extraordinary loyalty derived from the physical strength, wealth, and loyalty of the people". (Clausewitz, 1984). In this context, Malahayati consolidated the role of the people as a vital element in defense, building collective pride that strengthened people's motivation to be involved in defending their homeland.

In addition, there is one theory of total war proposed by Sun Tzu that has been carried out by Laksanama Malahayati, which is related to taking enemy resources to be used as resources for their own military strength. This seizure of resources was the logistics of the spoils of war that Malahayati carried out against the Portuguese in the Malacca Strait. Sun Tzu highlighted that taking resources from the enemy was a strategy

to reduce the burden on one's own people: "One load of enemy food is equivalent to twenty loads of one's own food" (Sun Tzu, 2000).

This total war effort was carried out by Malahayati at a critical moment when she witnessed her husband, Rear Admiral Ibrahim, die from being hit by a Portuguese ship cannon. The story recorded by Adi Pewara mentions that after her husband died, Malahayati immediately took command of the naval war and succeeded in seizing two Portuguese ships in the Malacca Strait. In this difficult situation, Malahayati took control of leading the battle, her anger made three Portuguese warships also sink in the middle of the Malacca Strait. (Adi Pewara, 1991).

Finally, in the section on the involvement of women in the maritime defense of the Sultanate of Aceh in the past. In the study of universal war theory, the involvement of the wider community in armed conflict is an important part. The integration and readiness of the community in warfare is fundamental to ensuring that non-combatant combat forces are on standby. That is what Malahayati did by forming the *Inong Balee* Force, which she asked directly to the Sultan of Aceh at that time.

Of course, Malahayati's involvement in Aceh's naval forces could not happen without the *political will* of the ruler at that time. At a time when women were still marginalized, Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah saw with a visionary view that Malahayati was a formidable figure who could contribute significantly to his military power. The theory of universal warfare by mobilizing all available resources, including viewing one's abilities not from a gender perspective, was an effort made by the Acehnese ruler at that time. Although the policy of appointing a woman in the judgment of a patriarchal society is a difficult thing to accept, Malahayati was able to provide evidence and outstanding performance when leading the Acehnese sea fleet.

In the historical records written by Adi Pewara (1991), the Sultan of Aceh at that time was Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah chose Malahayati as Commander of the Aceh Navy with the rank of full Admiral, in modern military this means a four-star admiral in charge of the entire war fleet. The rank and position was said to be worthy of Malahayati, because she had proven and devoted herself with full dedication to the people of Aceh.

4. Women's Power as a Non-Governmental Defense Force

In this last part of the discussion, researchers emphasized how women proved themselves capable of making real contributions and even becoming the frontline troops in defending the country. During this time, women are often placed in the figure of a weak creature. But Malahayati is different, from various historical facts women are considered as second-class citizens, especially in the military environment, Malahayati actually broke history by becoming the First Female Admiral in the World. Not only that, Malahayati also cooperated with women who had been negatively stigmatized such as widows to contribute significantly in defending their country.

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Previous research mentions at least three things related to the role of women in state resilience (Rumbekwan & Tanamal, 2023) namely;

1. Women's empowerment in national development.
2. National identity and women's role in national resilience.
3. The role of women in maintaining national unity and security.

In the study, it was outlined that the role of women in national development and resilience is very important, and women's empowerment is an ongoing effort to support this role. "Women's empowerment is an integral part of national development efforts. Given the rapid social, cultural, and economic changes occurring in the world today, women's empowerment is an ongoing effort that must keep up with these changes" (Rumbekwan & Tanamal, 2022).

In the context of Malahayati and *Inong Balee*, this is clearly related to their efforts in defending the sea territory of the Sultanate of Aceh at that time. They were part of the integral defense including building a strong military force in anticipation of the threat of state security from outside. They were formed on the realization that the Aceh region was under real threat from the forces that at that time came from the Portuguese and the Dutch. That's why Malahayati on her awareness as an Admiral asked permission from the ruler of the Aceh Sultanate at that time to involve women in sea defense efforts.

The second is related to national identity and women's leadership, which discusses how national identity is also closely related to the roles, impacts and responsibilities of women as citizens. In the context of Malahayati, who acted as a military leader and diplomat, this theory is very relevant. Rumbekwan (2023) explains that the national security perspective emphasizes that national identity is closely related to the roles and responsibilities of women. He said, this woman's responsibility even became a benchmark for how the nation could triumph. "If a woman is good, then the nation will prosper; conversely, if she does not act well, the nation will be destroyed." (Rumbekwan & Tanamal, 2023).

Third is women's participation in defense and security, previous research noted that women's involvement in security aspects has a significant impact on society. This is certainly in line with the formation of the *Inong Balee* troops in Aceh's maritime defense, Malahayati and the army of widows she led represent an example of women involving themselves in national defense. "Women play an important role in national security and resilience, shaping community identity and resilience." (Rumbekwan & Tanamal, 2023).

Enter the whole society approach proposed by Reznikova. She said that the application of the concept of resilience in the field of national security helps shape state strategies that enable countries to cope with threats, crises and other hazards of various origins. The principles of resilience applied in various fields, especially national security, require the involvement of state and local authorities, businesses and civil society." (Reznikova, 2021).

This resilience was demonstrated by Malahayati and her *Inong Balee* troops. When they were saddened by the loss of their beloved husbands, they were ready to apply the concept of resilience in the defense of Aceh at that time, when the Aceh region was threatened with sovereignty by the Portuguese. As women, they were not afraid to adapt and fight back when the threat arrived. This fragment can be seen in the story written by Saifullah "After her husband died in the war, she promised to take revenge and was determined to continue her husband's struggle even though she was alone. To fulfill this goal, Admiral Keumalahayati asked Sultan al-Mukammil to form an Acehnese fleet whose soldiers were all widowed women because their husbands had died in the Haru Bay War." (Saifullah, 2012).

This fragment of the story also illustrates how Admiral Malahayati carried out what is called the involvement of non-state actors in defending her sovereignty. The formation of the *Inong Balee* force is in line with Reznikova's theory that proper cooperation and synergy of security and defense forces, state and local authorities, businesses, and civil society are essential in ensuring national resilience. "It requires the joint efforts of various national security actors, including non-state actors, to deal with it effectively." (Reznikova, 2021).

Reznikova also believes that national resilience depends on coordinating efforts across all sectors of society, including public institutions, businesses and communities. In the context of Malahayati's struggle, in addition to empowering the *inong balee* troops, she also succeeded in mobilizing business commodities that were then in the territory of the Sultanate of Aceh. Malahayati dared to give assurances to the British Empire to trade safely, on the condition of alliance with the Sultanate of Aceh fighting the Portuguese in the Strait of Malacca.

Thus, it is very visible that the role of women was very dominating and became the main milestone of the maritime defense of the Kingdom of Aceh at that time and even made the glory of the Sultanate of Aceh even more victorious and feared during the leadership of the world's first female admiral, Admiral Malahayati.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research described above, it is clear that the role of women in maritime defense cannot be underestimated. Although currently, there are no more female admirals, especially as combat soldiers from the Indonesian National Army (TNI), the story of Admiral Malahayati will open wider opportunities for women to pursue careers as soldiers who might one day be equal to Admiral Malahayati. Doubts from the patriarchal and entrenched culture in the archipelago are gradually eroded by empirical evidence that women can also be empowered and compete alongside men. Admiral Malahayati is a concrete example of how

Wiryono et al. (2025). Admiral Malahayati: The Role of Women in Maritime Defense.

women can contribute directly in any field including in the field of defense which is considered taboo by some people.

Malahayati inspired women in Indonesia not to be afraid to dream of becoming anything, even to become the commander-in-chief of the country's navy. She opened a wide path for women, especially Acehese women, to fight at the forefront in fighting colonialism and protecting all their people from external threats, they not only played a role, but also had an impact on the maritime defense of the Sultanate of Aceh at that time. This research is expected to be a consideration for an inclusive policy in the realm of TNI military policy, especially the marine dimension, to provide wider opportunities for the nation's best daughters to follow in Malahayati's footsteps. They do not need to feel the pain of being a widow whose husband died in battle, they only need a more gender-equalizing policy so that the career path in the TNI can open up more career opportunities for female soldiers.

Hopefully in the future there will be more detailed follow-up research related to the recruitment policies of TNI female cadets, including their inclusive policies in order to compete in the world of military careers. Because as long as the TNI has been established, there has never been a female General, Marshal, or four-star Admiral who has become the highest command of the armed forces in Indonesia. Whereas in the past, apart from Malahayati, there were Martha Cristina Tiahahu, Cut Nyak Dien, Raden Ajeng Kartini, Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, Cut Meutia and many other female fighters who contributed greatly to the struggle for Indonesian independence and became troop leaders.

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