

## THE ROLE OF INDONESIA'S STRATEGIC PARTNERS IN MAINTAINING SOUTH CHINA MARITIME SECURITY

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### ABSTRACT

For Indonesia, the Indo-Pacific region is a regional concept that involves ASEAN as the most strategic region. The World Maritime Axis Policy for Indonesia is important with a focus on the Indo-Pacific region with maritime cooperation that can continue to be strengthened with other countries in the region, both through ASEAN as a strategic regional organization and cooperation with countries outside ASEAN membership, including India. This research use qualitative methods. The required library data can then be collected from journal articles, books, related media news in recent years, and national documents of each country. Strategic partnerships provide freedom for Indonesia without being bound by alliance obligations, in which regionally relevant middle-power partners with the same interests can collectively enhance Indonesia's defense capabilities. The opportunity to forge strategic partnerships with Japan, India, and Australia is to be noticed. Through strategic partnerships, Indonesia can continue to carry out its Free and Active foreign policy while meeting security needs to deal with regional threats. Deeper strategic partnerships with Japan, India, and Australia can then be a prospect that deserves further exploration because, besides this. It is a form of arrangement between middle powers countries that have shared values such as democracy, recognizing the importance of maritime security, preventing domination of one hegemon in Asia, maintaining the free and open Indo-Pacific (including the security and stability of the South China Sea), respecting the sovereignty of each country, and surviving the vortex of great powers competition, cooperation between partner countries is also following policy principles Free Active and able to meet Indonesia's security needs.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

For Indonesia, the Indo-Pacific region is a regional concept that involves ASEAN as the most strategic region. According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, Retno Marsudi said that the centrality of ASEAN plays an important role in the Indo-Pacific region to moderate interests and accommodate the role of its member countries to advance in the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). Indonesia's interests also emphasize the centrality of ASEAN as a medium in realizing its foreign policy goals, including the World Maritime Axis. The President of the Republic of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, at the 13th East Asia Summit, stated the importance of maritime cooperation to ensure the stability of the security of the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean as a Single Geo-Strategic Theater (KSP, 2019). It explains that the World Maritime Axis Policy for Indonesia is important with a focus on the Indo-Pacific region with maritime cooperation that can continue to be strengthened with other countries in the region, both through ASEAN as a strategic regional organization and cooperation with countries outside ASEAN membership, including India.

Other studies also pay attention to the responses and strategies taken by several countries outside Southeast Asia that are interested in the South China Sea contest. Ma and Wills (2016) outline a map of the interests of non-claimant countries in territorial disputes. They show a strategic dilemma where a country's desire to uphold international maritime law and norms more strongly is hindered by calculations if such actions take more resources compared to the results obtained in influencing Chinese behavior. Regarding the United States, Qingli and Ramasamy (2020) argue that the US has so far used a strategy of naming and shaming as rhetorical coercion to put pressure on China with less significant results and has not been able

to stop China's expansion. For India itself, Jawli (2016) admits that in India's extended neighborhood concept, China's dominance in the South China Sea has implications for mastery over the strategic choke point, namely the Malacca Strait, and this can hinder India's access to the Pacific and threaten India's 'backyard' as a whole. Direct. In his study, Yoshimatsu (2017) shows how Japan is trying to adapt to China's strategy in the South China Sea by increasing the formation of multilateral institutions that are developed from maritime safety to maritime security aimed at China. As for Australia, Varrall (2021) shows how Canberra began to change its position from being alerted to being alarmed through an assessment of threats from China to Australia's national security and concerns about the ability of Pacific Island countries to counter China's influence. From some of the literature, there is an opportunity to assess further the geostrategic calculus faced by Indonesia and review what options Indonesia has when it comes to being involved in the contestation in the South China Sea.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Types and Sources of Data

This research use qualitative methods. The required library data can then be collected from journal articles, books, related media news in recent years, and national documents of each country, such as security strategy white papers, especially since Xi Jinping came to power in 2013. , and at the start of Jokowi's leadership era in Indonesia in 2014, along with his foreign policy track record relating to the South China Sea. What will be sought here are forms of bilateral security cooperation, economic and industrial linkages, statements from the Indonesian government towards certain countries since 2014, public perception of related countries, and diplomatic activities or external relations by institutions. Domestic. State documents are the primary data that will be used in this research. Meanwhile, secondary data references or analyzes the contents of primary documents. The secondary documents can be news, book literature, space journals, and the like.

### 2.2 Method of Analysis

The data in this study will be interpreted and then analyzed using a conceptual framework for securitization. This writing also presents the possibility of reformulation in formulating research questions. The last phase is writing the findings on the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The concept of securitization in the form of its seven analysis components is classified as a variable.

Through the data that has been obtained, an interpretation of the data will be carried out. The classification of data relevant to the writing question will facilitate the data analysis process in the theoretical and conceptual analysis sections. The classified data will then be found with the variables present in the securitization. The conceptual analysis will examine the relationship between the research variables and the data used. The results of the conceptual analysis can provide new information that will influence the direction of this research. Thus, changes in research questions and additional data to be analyzed can be encountered. If through data interpretation, a relevance is found between the theoretical variables and the data used, the findings will be written in the closing and conclusion sections.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Japan: Anchor of The East Asia

As a close ally of the United States and a party that has a great interest in ensuring that sea lines of communication that pass through the South China Sea remain free and open, Japan has tried to build capable military capacity in protecting territorial sea areas and participating in military exercises and freedom of navigation. Operations. We can see this with the increasing ability to project the power of the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) in various dimensions. On land, the JSDF formed the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB) as an elite unit that could be deployed to defend or seize islands on Japan's borders (Gady, 2016). At sea and in the air, acquiring the F-35A stealth fighter and modifying Izumo-class ships to carry the F-35B variant demonstrates efforts to increase cross-dimensional capabilities within the JSDF (Lendon & Wakatsuki, 2018; Osborn, 2021).

It is a response to China's growing power and maritime ambitions in the region, not only in the South China Sea but also in the disputed islands in the East China Sea. One of the highlights is the Senkaku Islands, where China's decision to implement the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) and escort Chinese fishing boats to the disputed area along with Chinese Coast Guard and Navy vessels has resulted in strong protests from Japan (Lendon, 2020; Park, 2013). However, as an archipelagic country geographically lacking

resources, Japan's economy needs to be supported by access to energy and export-import flows to various countries.

Japan's vision of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' is more likely to materialize if its partners in Southeast Asia can deal with China's coercive actions in contested areas. It will require Indonesia to be an influential country in the region. For Indonesia itself, maritime domain awareness technology, advanced radars, and Japanese surveillance tools are important components in the modernization and acquisition of defense equipment, where Prabowo's planned purchase of Mogami-class frigates is also a roadmap that can be pursued (Engel, 2021a). What is certain is that the current close relationship deserves to be maintained and developed further into a strategic partnership. The two countries need each other to deal with the current dynamic geopolitical situation. Japan and Indonesia cannot face regional security challenges alone, and a deeper relationship can bring mutual benefits for securing sovereignty and leveraging the capabilities of both countries.

### **3.2 India: Anchor of the Indian Ocean**

In recent years, India has been trying to increase its capabilities and maintain its dominance in the Indian Ocean and South Asia to deal with China's influence which has begun to enter areas that have been India's "backyard." India is one of the five largest arms-importing countries in the world. Call it the acquisition of 36 units of Dassault Rafale fighter aircraft, AEW&C aircraft that combine Israel's EL/W-2090 Phalcon radar system with Russia's Beriev A-50 platform, and Boeing CH-47 Chinook transport helicopters and AH-64 Apache attack helicopters. USA (Pandit, 2020; Pubby, 2018; Vaid, 2022).

As a regional power with ambitions to become a great power, India cannot remain silent if China threatens its traditional sphere of influence. Especially if we look at India's position as the sixth largest economy (2.9 trillion dollars) and the third largest defense budget (72.9 billion dollars) just below China, India intends to pursue China's capabilities while maintaining its autonomy and influence in the global political arena. (IMF.org, 2021; Lopes da Silva et al., 2021).

As one of the largest operators of the P-8 Poseidon aircraft, a maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) the web and its allies also use, as well as the AEW&C Phalcon aircraft, India has the appropriate capabilities to oversee the activities of maritime and air services in the South China Sea, which can close Indonesia's capability gap which still lacks long-range and modern ISR platforms (Vavasar, 2021). Besides that, if countries like Vietnam or the Philippines can forge close ties and gain access to technology, then why is it that Indonesia, a country that can be considered the de facto leader of Southeast Asia, still has not forged a deeper strategic partnership with a crucial regional power like India? Imagine the potential for cooperation with India that Indonesia can get. The Indonesian Navy, Air Force, and Bakamla can receive intelligence and reconnaissance data from India's satellite images monitoring the South China Sea. Indonesia's maritime and air ISR range can also be increased with the help of the P-8 Poseidon patrol, which can monitor and track the activities of Chinese warships and submarines, and Phalcon's AEW&C capability can help coordinate Indonesian and Indian air assets to detect and intercept Chinese warplanes carrying intrusion into Indonesian airspace.

Prabowo's plan to buy the Rafale can also provide an opportunity for Indonesia to share experiences with India as a fellow user, not to mention several other air platforms used by the two countries' air forces, such as the Russian-made Sukhoi Su-30. There is potential to increase the interoperability of Indian and Indonesian assets through increasing logistical cooperation, officer exchanges, and joint combat exercises that can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the two countries' operations in the South China Sea region.

What is clear, the potential for a strategic partnership with India cannot be missed in Indonesia. The two countries need to strengthen the existing historical link and frame the partnership as a form of cooperation between the two regional powers that have the intention of modernizing their armed forces, respecting each other's roles and positions in international politics, and are committed to preventing the domination of regional hegemony that threaten the sovereignty and stability of Indo-Pacific.

### **3.3 Australia: Anchor of The Oceania**

As a regional power that considers the Indo-Pacific stability crucial, Australia has, in recent years, also attempted to increase its defense capability. It was done as a response to the development of China's military capability in projecting its strength in the Indo-Pacific region and modernizing its defense equipment to compete with other developed countries.

In addition to acquiring and modernizing defense equipment, Australia recognizes that its national interests cannot be separated from regional security, where a strong and committed partner is needed to help Australia. This attention was an important factor that prompted Australia to surprise its neighboring countries by forming the AUKUS defense pact with the US and Great Britain (Ward & McLeary, 2021).

Australia will get a unique capability that only the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus India, have. Nuclear-powered submarines can move faster, are more difficult to detect, dive longer, operate farther, are capable of firing missiles, and carry more supplies than conventional submarines. This capability for Australia is crucial in dealing with the current Indo-Pacific strategic situation. This (BBC News, 2021). As a country that upholds the principle of nuclear non-proliferation and is worried about a regional arms race, Indonesia has also spoken out about this situation, with Foreign Minister Retno expressing her concerns when meeting Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne in November 2021 (CNN Indonesia, 2021). However, even though Australia implicitly stated that the existence of AUKUS was a counter to China's activities, some observers saw that Indonesia's response to AUKUS tended to be more vocal than, for example, China's efforts to develop hypersonic missiles with nuclear warheads, a strategic weapon that far more threatened stability and regional peace (Engel, 2021b).

As strategic partners in their respective regions, Indonesia in Southeast Asia and Australia in Oceania, it is fitting for the two countries to cultivate existing relations and build strategic partnership channels in other fields. Both Indonesia and Australia have committed to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership which includes pillars such as economic development, connectivity, common and regional interests, maritime cooperation, and contributing to the security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific. The two countries are also trying to link their economies through the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA).

So far, efforts have been made to strengthen diplomatic relations between the two countries, such as through military exercises in the form of Exercise Wirra Jaya, Exercise Cassowary, and Exercise Pitch Black involves the land, sea, and air dimensions of the two countries. However, military cooperation can be increased by holding cross-dimensional exercises, especially sea and air, and increasing military interoperability in potential conflict scenarios in the South China Sea. Defense cooperation between the two countries must be directed to become an asset for regional security and stability, especially in the maritime domain. Forms of bilateral relations, such as education and exchange of officers, logistics planning, dialogues, and seminars, in maritime surveillance and maritime intelligence, can emphasize common maritime challenges (Laksmana, 2018). What is clear to increase defense capability, a strategic partnership that focuses on shared maritime values with Australia is an opportunity that Indonesia should not miss.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

China's activities and militarization to strengthen its claims over the South China Sea have intensified since Xi Jinping took office. Even though Indonesia is technically a non-claimant state, China's claims intersect with the North Natuna Sea and intrusions by Chinese fishermen to fish illegally in Indonesian territory, which is often also escorted by coast guard ships to boats. China's naval war is not only a threat to territorial sovereignty but also regional stability and security. Strategic partnerships provide freedom for Indonesia without being bound by alliance obligations, in which regionally relevant middle-power partners with the same interests can collectively enhance Indonesia's defense capabilities.

The opportunity to forge strategic partnerships with Japan, India, and Australia is to be noticed. Through strategic partnerships, Indonesia can continue to carry out its Free and Active foreign policy while meeting security needs to deal with regional threats. Deeper strategic partnerships with Japan, India, and Australia can then be a prospect that deserves further exploration because, besides this. It is a form of arrangement between middle powers countries that have shared values such as democracy, recognizing the importance of maritime security, preventing domination of one hegemon in Asia, maintaining the free and open Indo-Pacific (including the security and stability of the South China Sea), respecting the sovereignty of each country, and surviving the vortex of great powers competition, cooperation between partner countries is also following policy principles Free Active and able to meet Indonesia's security needs.

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