



Indonesia's Defense Policy in the Great Power Competition Era

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Abstract

This study explores Indonesia's defense policy in the current era of great power competition. Great Power Competition (GPC) is the term used to describe hegemony and sphere of influence rivalries between the global powers to exercise their influence and alter the global security constellation for their national interests. The current GPC is dominated by the U.S., China, and Russia, while other nations of the world are trying to find their position within the spectrum of power dynamics towards the global powers by either bandwagoning, balancing, or even hedging. Southeast Asia's power dynamics are mostly bipolar between the U.S. and China and shape the regional countries' defense policies. As a leading country in the Southeast Asia region, Indonesia is the middle power in the international power constellation and intends to further step up on the power hierarchy. This study aims to highlight the possible formulation of Indonesia's defense policy amidst the GPC era. The study proposes a formulation of Indonesia's defense posture with a qualitative analytical approach based on Mahnken's theory of competitive strategies that is suitable within the spectrum of current power dynamics and appropriate within the national interest framework of foreign policy while weighing both leverage points and dilemmatic challenges. The analysis uses survey data from well-known institutes along with complementary literature interpretation. In conclusion, the article provides a comprehensive finding that Indonesia, like the rest of the nations in the region, prefers balanced relations with the great powers, along with several suggestions on considering the propensity of inward-looking military capabilities, diplomatic competence, and an out-of-sync relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy in formulating defense policy.

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INTRODUCTION

The existence of the Great Power Competition (GPC) has been quite persistent throughout world history. The dynamic environment of power constellations allows room for anarchy, where the lack of perpetual dominance of power provides the space for nations to compete for superiority by projecting their spheres of influence regionally or even globally. In the current era of unipolarity, where the U.S. seems to be the most dominant nation in the world. Vuving (2020) argues that the power rivalry has shifted down in scale and type from global to regional and asymmetrical competition. This argument is aligned with the perpetual concept of GPC as a hegemony rivalry that always occurs in any timeline while morphing into various forms (Ashford, 2021). The horrendous example of GPC can be seen along the timeline of human existence. From the Battle of the Peloponnesian in ancient Greece to modern conflicts and wars such as World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the latest, the war in Ukraine, they are all the result of the friction between great powers (Lynch III, 2020). Lynch further argues that the global strategic environment has shifted the power polarity from bipolarity during the Cold War era between the U.S. and the Soviet Union to the era of multipolarity, where more actors are rising and competing for hegemony.

Currently, the international actors rivaling for hegemonies are in the form of a triumvirate consisting of the U.S., Russia, and China, where China is likely to be the revisionist power to replace the declining U.S. as the old power (Lynch III, 2020). This assumption is pretty much clear with the existing symptoms that strengthen the indicators that China is overtaking the U.S. position as the global power in many aspects such as economy, diplomacy, and noticeably in military capability. The phenomenon of six big economies, namely China, Russia, Brazil, India, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, ditching the U.S. dollar is one fact of the declining influence of the U.S. in economic aspects (Siripurapu, 2020). Interesting facts, such as the acceptance of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, by many nations (China Power, 2017), and the upending of Middle East diplomacy with Saudi Arabia and Iran's peace deal brokered by China (Barker, 2023) support the notion above on the rise of the dragon and the decline of the bald eagle.

In addition, the fact that China's military capability has grown fourfold since 1996 in comparison with the U.S. military decline is also undeniable evidence of the shifting of global power (Cordesman & Hwang, 2021). Although Russia is not likely to directly rival the U.S. in the GPC like China, the current development of the war in Ukraine proves otherwise. Russia's vision known as "Eurasia Focus" (Lynch III, 2020), has dragged the world into new world energy crises since Russia is one of the main producers of natural gas and occupied Ukraine is the largest producer of wheat, sunflower oil, and seed. The trickle-down effect of the war is felt all around the world. Nevertheless, since this study focuses on the effect of the GPC on Indonesia's defense policy, the analysis revolves around the Southeast Asia region, where the Sino-American dyad is dominant, and Russia's footprint is fleeting.

The GPC between the U.S. and China in Southeast Asia and the wider Pacific arena has a different tone from the Cold War one. While during the Cold War, the military arms

race was predominant, the current GPC is multidimensional, with the economy, diplomacy, and military rivalry as the showcase. Notably, the trade war between the U.S. and China (Amadeo, 2022) and the U.S. perception of China's exploitation of its economic power over other countries while undermining their autonomy (Department of Defense, 2019) are two main issues emerging in the economic aspect. In the field of diplomacy, the U.S. seems to be losing its influence in world hegemony by confronting conflict with military power, as was the case in Iraq and Afghanistan, where diplomacy is a dead end and the military operations did not bring any significant results. In the military domain, China is seeking to realign its influence by asserting military forces (Pascal, 2021). China's distinct approach in forwarding the Gray Zone tactic in the South China Sea issue to keep escalation below the bare minimum of open conflict and put everything checked to avoid escalation to war is a clear example of its assertion (Lynch III, 2020).

The GPC narrative was developed under Obama's administration and coined during Trump's administration in an explicit document of the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) and 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) to describe the competition over hegemony mainly between the U.S., China, and Russia on the side (O'Rourke, 2022). Furthermore, the emergence of the narrative signifies the concern that indicates the rise of a new competing power other than the U.S., which is deemed to be the old power and China emerges as the new one, while Russia is more the transformed power from the previous Soviet Union (Ashford, 2021).

The power dynamics between the U.S. and China, particularly in Southeast Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific region, and their influence on Indonesia's defense policy formulation are the highlight of this study. Due to the inclination and proximity of the two great power nations, particularly in East Asia and Southeast Asia, the power dynamics in this region are prominent when each nation tries to establish the sustainability of influence and power. The contestation between the two great powers has a significant influence on Indonesia's defense policy formulation while observing Indonesia's geopolitical position in the region. Indonesia's perspective and stance have become more influential for the following reasons: Indonesia is the largest Muslim-majority country, the third largest democracy, the seventh-largest economy by purchasing power, the fourth largest population, and holds the leading position in the region within the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asia Nations) organization (U.S. Department of State, 2022). In addition, Indonesia's prevalence also considers its strategic geographical position between two oceans and the two main masses of continents, its vast maritime territory, and its large potential for natural resources. These accolades have endowed Indonesia with the potential to play a larger role in regional and global power dynamics.

For this article, the discussions will be comprised of four sections. The first section presents the background and historical narrative behind the GPC concept, which provide the segue to the focus on the U.S.-China rivalry. The second section describes the methods of analysis used for this study. In addition, this section discusses the competitive strategies theory as the underlying framework for this study. The third

section acts as the core of this article by describing the essence of U.S. and Chinese power dynamics in Southeast Asia and their influence on the formulation of Indonesia's defense policy. The final section provides a summary and conclusion regarding Indonesia's military policy, considering GPC dynamics. In response to the issue, this study offers thoughts and recommendations for shaping Indonesia's future defense status. Indonesia's defense policy is derived from its national foreign policy of nonalignment and the doctrine of being independent and active. Therefore, for its realization, Indonesia is conducting a flexible hedging strategy within the foreign policy framework, also known as double hedging, towards the U.S. and China that enclosed the defense policy (Javadi, 2016; Mubah, 2019). This policy expects the maintenance of balance within the spectrum of power dynamics which is aligned with independent and active principles. Overall, this study aims to offer possible defense policy formulations for Indonesia amidst the contemporary GPC era.

METHODS

A qualitative approach is used for this study with a narrative interpretation method towards the related literature to the topic issue. The data collected is sourced from literature ranging from books to articles pertinent to this topic. A qualitative case study method is a well-established approach to examining a problem in terms of comprehending and deciphering the complexity of the problem into more comprehensible information. A literature review is useful to extract the underlining ideas that relate to the research topic (Creswell, 2014). With the inclusion of the researcher's interpretation of the available literature, significant factors can be identified to support the suggestions and conclusions formulation.

This study uses the competitive strategies theory developed by Mahnken (2012), which perceives the world as a perpetual constellation of competing powers lurking for hegemony that is continuously shifting. The shifting time is relative to the collective influencing factors that are significant in pushing toward adjustment. Besides the triumvirate of the U.S., China, and Russia, many other countries are placed in the mid-power status. Moreover, the theory discusses extending influence with or without the use of force during peacetime to attain national interests.

This study examines Indonesia's position and its possible power projection within the power dynamics spectrum amid the GPC, particularly in the particular area of Southeast Asia, with the U.S. on one end and China on the other end. The influence of the escalated rivalry between the major powers in the region that directly affects Indonesia as one of the countries in the region is the main interest of this study. This study aims to formulate a feasible and plausible proposal for Indonesia's defense policy that conforms to the dynamics of the strategic environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Great Power Competition in Southeast Asia

The Indo-Pacific region has withstood the intense rivalry between the U.S. and China for decades since the two great powers share a similar interest in the region.

Southeast Asia is specifically interesting for its potential economic and influence value, which the U.S. is trying to preserve and China is trying to wield. Taking the case of the South China Sea as the center of the rivalry, the U.S. has the agenda to sustain its sphere of influence by campaigning for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and Freedom of Navigation (FoN) to contest China's assertiveness in the South China Sea, which call for a free passage right in the area that is considered international water due to the customary international law perspective. From a different viewpoint, China has the agenda to advance the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to further its influence regionally and globally. To support that agenda, gaining control over the chain of islands in the South China Sea becomes a necessary strategy, despite the contradiction with customary international law and the conflict with the neighboring countries (Lynch III, 2020). Interestingly, China's combination approach of furthering economic influence supported by military assertiveness is likely gaining more traction and insidiously eroding U.S. influence in the region. Moreover, China's aggressiveness in unilaterally claiming the chain of islands and constructing military installations on reclaimed islands has gone unchallenged factually, not even by the U.S., despite the arbitration ruling and continuous protest from many countries (Stromseth, 2020). This is a clear affirmation of China's growing power and influence in the region.

Based on the U.S. and China's capability comparison, China is the revisionist power, while the U.S. is the old dominant. To support this argument, this study uses the analysis by Patton, Sato, & Lemahieu (2023) from the Lowy Institute, which measures power based on two determinants, resource-based and influence-based. Both categories are broken down into four measures. Resource-based factors constitute military capability, economic capability, resilience, and future resources. Meanwhile, influence-based factors encompass defense networks, economic relationships, cultural influence, and diplomatic influence (Patton et al., 2023). Looking at these measurements, the study can make a direct comparison to capture the power dynamics between the U.S. and China. Figure 1 describes how China is overtaking the U.S. in economic relationships and, surprisingly, in diplomatic influence by a tiny margin. However, in comparison with the previous year's index in 2020 (Lemahieu & Leng, 2020), China is having a setback for several of its capabilities, which were hampered mostly by its strict, self-imposed isolation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic policy. Meanwhile, the U.S. is taking the top position largely due to China's setbacks (Patton et al., 2023). In conclusion, power dynamics are at play between the great powers due to the global pandemic that has had significant effects globally.

From Figure 1, the U.S. keeps a clear lead on defense networks, cultural influence, military capability, and resilience, indicating that it remains the most powerful country in the Indo-Pacific region. However, the U.S. only leads by a very narrow margin in terms of future resources and economic capability. In addition, Russia, as the third great power, gains more irrelevance and loses its strategic preoccupation and engagement in Southeast Asia particularly due to its invasion of Ukraine. This phenomenon is understandable, for during the Cold War, the Soviet Union's influence was significant in the region. When it transformed into Russia, the engagement was losing traction.

Moreover, it signifies the bipolar competition between the U.S. and China in the Indo-Pacific region. Interestingly, the triumvirate of great powers register the greatest loss of global relative power index for 2023 with China minus 2.1, the U.S. minus 1.5, and Russia minus 1.4 (Patton et al., 2023).

Additionally, the survey report by the ISEAS-Yusof-Ishak Institute takes on the most influential economies and political and strategic powers in Southeast Asia (Seah, Martinus, & Thao, 2021; Seah, Lin, Martinus, Suvannaphakdy, & Thao, 2023). On the notion of the most influential economy, the survey taken in 2023 reveals that 59.9% of the respondents perceive China as the most influential economy in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, the U.S. only managed to reach a value of 10.5%. In alignment with the result from the Lowy Institute on diplomatic influence, the result of this survey notes that China is the most influential political and strategic power in Southeast Asia with 41.5%, while the U.S. only registers 31.9% (Seah et al., 2023). In confirmation with the finding of the Lowy Institute, the declining trend of the influence and power of the great power was also captured by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute with data comparison from previous years of 2021 (Seah et al., 2021). The numbers show that China is dominant over the U.S. in the region. However, on the one hand, this value does not mean that the respondents have put their trust in China. Unfortunately, on the other hand, it also does not indicate the respondents' trust in the U.S. Most respondents have no confidence in the U.S. doing the right thing in global affairs, particularly regarding China's issue (Stromseth, 2019).

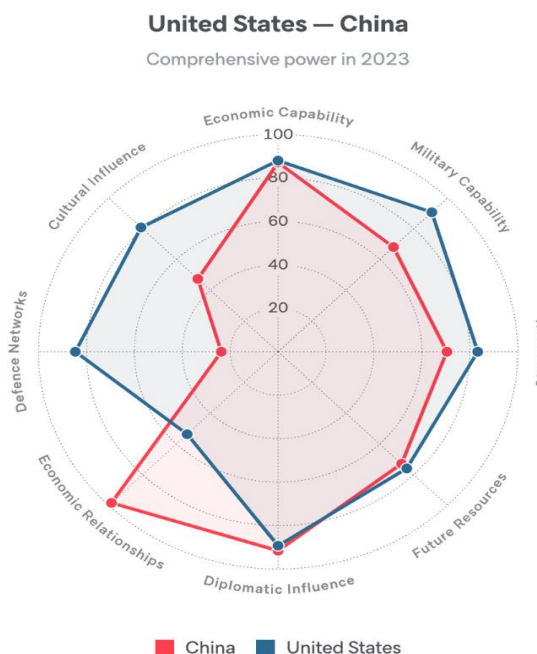


Figure 1. The U.S. vs China Comparison (Lowy Institute, 2023; Patton et al., 2023)

The surveys from both institutions provide findings that China is lurking as a revisionist power by shadowing the U.S. influence. China intends to broaden its sphere of influence in the region, while the U.S.'s influence is declining, particularly in the economic relationship and growing military power that moves linearly with the

diplomatic influence. China's expanding economic power and capacity, which already surpass those of the U.S., and the projection that its armed forces will approach the size of the U.S. military are the key drivers of this situation. Increasing numbers of countries in the region are economically dependent on China. This advantage has raised China in comparison to the U.S. Moreover, China's rapid recovery from the COVID-19 crisis may demonstrate the economic capacity that will assist China in achieving economic dominance in the region. In contrast, the United States is more likely to lose economic significance in the region to China, given its slower recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Countries in the region tend to believe that China's rising influence is inevitable in the future based on its economic trajectory. This projection by China incited the U.S. to go with a realist approach and hawkish policy towards China during Trump's administration. However, it turned out to be a self-defeating approach that backfired on the U.S. since no country's leaders were willing to sacrifice their economic relationship with China by siding with the U.S. administration's transition to Biden's administration, many countries in the region are waiting for the U.S. to change its approach towards China to create a more conducive strategic environment. However, that possibility may grow dim since Biden will hold on to the perceived power competition with China, although with a lower tone of adversity (Ashford, 2021).

Indonesia's Foreign Policy

Indonesia is very well known for its nonaligned foreign policy with an independent and active doctrine dating back to its independence throughout today's great power competition era. Indonesia's desire for balance and nonalignment might best describe its foreign policy. Indonesia is persistent with this policy for international interaction to include the great powers. Indonesia is aware that its geographic location and copious natural resources may lure the world's major powers to seek its fealty. However, the risk of a nation taking a stand within a certain allegiance could result in a somber consequence. In light of this, Indonesia's founding fathers determined that the nation's foreign policies should be those of an independent yet active nation promoting global peace. Indonesia views the best course of action as the one that prevents it from becoming embroiled in an international crisis and preserves its sovereignty. This so-called independent and active doctrine policy has benefited Indonesia well throughout this time, particularly in the GPC era. Some of the supporting arguments for this notion are elaborated on in the next paragraph. Therefore, there is no reason for the great power states to expect any form of allegiance from Indonesia (Blank, 2021).

This stance is the foundation for Indonesia's foreign policies, which extends to many other aspects of international relations, including but not limited to trade (economy), diplomatic and political relations, and military cooperation. However, the emergence of unique circumstances may alter the policy, though with carefully crafted treaties or agreements. Nonetheless, the implementation of foreign policies has been one of Indonesia's challenges concerning the power dynamics of the great powers (Pattiradjawane, 2016).

However, Indonesia's nonalignment policy implies balancing its security partnership not exclusively with the Sino-American rivalry but including other countries, including U.S. allies and partner nations such as Australia, South Korea, Japan, and several European countries such as France and the United Kingdom (Blank, 2021). Indonesia maintains its persistence with the policy of remaining nonaligned with either power bloc. One notable example is the daunting visit of Indonesia's president, Joko Widodo, to the leaders of the warring countries, Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russia's Vladimir Putin, in 2022. This visit may not be realized if Indonesia sides with one of the power blocs. Another perspective to depict Indonesia's nonaligned policy is the economic aspect. China's contribution to Indonesia's total national export is approximately 13.7%, which makes China the biggest export market for Indonesia, exceeding Japan with 10.5% and even the U.S. with 10.6%. In addition, China's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is far more significant than the U.S. investment in Indonesia. China is worth \$2.4 billion, while the U.S. is only worth half of it with \$1.2 billion, and this is even after omitting \$2 billion of Hong Kong's FDI (Blank, 2021). Looking at this fact, the relationship between Indonesia and China is a mutual one. With China as its biggest economic strategic partner, Indonesia gets the benefits of FDI. Likewise, China expects to be able to access a larger part of Indonesia's maritime routes, including the Archipelagic Sea Lanes (ASL), which cover most of Southeast Asia's maritime region, to further its BRI and Maritime Silk Road plan. Therefore, a mutual agreement for both countries' benefit would cement the understanding that an economic relationship is significant for both countries. Refusing to take sides in this battle for hegemony becomes a logical option, which Indonesia shared with other countries in the region, considering that there is too much at stake for the national interest when the economy is leaning towards China's economic clout (Stromseth, 2019). Besides that, Indonesia's embracement of the BRI initiative is merely to support its national interests while using the initiative as a catalyst for its objectives. Therefore, it cannot be taken as a gesture of economic allegiance whatsoever (Richardson, 2020).

In other term, Indonesia exerts considerable diplomatic effort to maintain a balanced position between the U.S. and China in its foreign policy (Mubah, 2019). From Indonesia's perspective, the rise of China is inevitable. Indonesia's decision to engage with China is now a viable course of action not just for Indonesia but also for other Southeast Asian nations. Facing the limited strategic options available, Indonesia prioritizes the ASEAN-centric approach to moderate the competition in the region while also campaigning for a bigger audience (Stromseth, 2019). Under Indonesia's leadership, ASEAN promulgates ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) with the "ASEAN-centrality" concept that emphasizes inclusiveness, economic development, and connectivity (Stromseth, 2020). This approach aims to mitigate the building of tension between the great power states in the region. Moreover, ASEAN member countries opt for a more constructive relationship building in comparison to the adversarial relationship that may incite instability and insecurity in the region. The survey result points out that 45.5% of the ASEAN member countries choose to balance the pressure from the extra-regional powers by forwarding ASEAN resilience (Seah et al., 2023).

Based on this sentiment and the ASEAN leader's role, Indonesia has a reason to urge the other member countries to support the effort to maintain regional stability and peace despite the growing rivalry between the U.S. and China and their political inclination towards one of the great powers. This policy taken by Indonesia can be termed a "double hedging" or "flexible hedging option" due to its nature, which plays two roles as an independent state actor and as a member of the ASEAN platform (Javadi, 2016; Mubah, 2019). A double hedging strategy is implemented by maintaining and balancing relations with both great power countries. While keeping a good economic relationship with China on the one hand, Indonesia and ASEAN still maintain the U.S. involvement for maintaining security and stability in the region (Mubah, 2019). The risk of an escalating conflict between the two powers may severely affect the region. For that reason, taking the option of a double hedging strategy is the logical and realistic option to be taken. Expectedly, Indonesia and ASEAN can get benefit from this approach in their relationships with the two powers to fulfill their national interests.

Measuring Indonesia's National Power

National power fundamentally comprises three realms. The first one is natural resources or capabilities regarding the availability or capability of a country's production. The second one is the national performance that brings about the efficiency of the governing institution or the state in responding to emerging problems from within or external to a country. The third one is the military capabilities resulting from strategic resources used to build military power and consequently converted into effective coercive power (Treverton & Jones, 2005). This section discusses Indonesia's military capabilities as one of the elements of national power from these three realms.

This study looks at the Lowy Institute 2023 survey report on Asia's power index to elaborate on Indonesia's comprehensive power capabilities (Patton et al., 2023). In general, all countries are showing a downward trend, except for Indonesia, Australia with no change, and Brunei with an upward trend. Based on the survey, Indonesia is in the middle power countries group with no change and a comprehensive power index of 19.4 out of 100, which signifies a constant trend in the perceived national power (see Table 1). Indonesia is below South Korea and Singapore with 29.5 and 25.1, respectively. However, it is above Thailand and Malaysia with 18.7 and 18.0, respectively (Patton et al., 2023). Several measurements within the comprehensive power are related to military power. These measurements are military capability, resilience, and defense networks. Looking at military capability measurement, Indonesia scores a 16.3 index with the rank of 13th. The military capability measurement then comprises several sub-measures of defense spending with a 1.7 score index, armed forces with a 23.8 score index, weapons, and platforms with a 7.4 score index, signature capabilities with a 12.9 score index, and Asian military posture with a 40.2 score index (Lowy Institute, 2023).

Table 1. Asia Power Index Comprehensive Power (Lowy Institute, 2023; Patton et al., 2023)

Rank	Country	Score	Trend
1	The U.S.	80.7	Down
2	China	72.5	Down
3	Japan	37.2	Down
4	India	36.3	Down
5	Russia	31.6	Down
6	Australia	30.9	-
7	South Korea	29.5	Down
8	Singapore	25.1	Down
9	Indonesia	19.4	-
10	Thailand	18.7	Down
11	Malaysia	18.0	Down
12	Vietnam	17.5	Down
13	New Zealand	16.8	Down
14	Taiwan	15.2	Down
15	Pakistan	13.9	Down
16	Philippines	12.8	Down
17	North Korea	10.6	Down
18	Brunei	10.0	Up
19	Bangladesh	9.1	Down
20	Cambodia	7.8	Down

Furthermore, Indonesia scores 33.8 score index on the resilience measurement, which ranks in 7th place, comprising sub-measures of internal stability with a 50.8 score index, resource security with a 61.1 score index, and geoeconomic security with a 72.9 score index (Lowy Institute, 2023). Meanwhile, for the defense networks measurement, Indonesia scores 14.8 with the rank of 13th. This measurement comprises the sub-measures regional alliance network with a 0 score index since Indonesia is not in any form of defense alliance with other countries, regional defense diplomacy with a 28.0 score index, and global defense partnership with a 1.8 score index (Lowy Institute, 2023). The overall scores put Indonesia in the middle position of power dynamics. Overall, Indonesia has a sufficient defense and military index in comparison with the neighboring countries.

The interpretation of these numbers shows that Indonesia has the potential capacity to catapult to the upper portion of the middle power or even into the category of a major power. Indonesia is prospective to meet the criteria of significant major powers in terms of strategic position, economic potential, maritime potential, natural resources, and population capacity. Supposedly, Indonesia can quickly climb up the rank within the power constellation. This ascension may happen with the precondition of having effective governance in managing the three realms of national power. From the comparison between the years 2021 and 2023, Indonesia ascends its index of national power from previously below Thailand and Malaysia to surpassing those two countries while also showing that the strategy taken by the Indonesian government during the pandemic is proven to be successful with the constant power index despite the general

downward trends for other countries and the increasing index of internal stability of 50.8 (Lemahieu & Leng, 2020; Lowy Institute, 2023; Patton et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, Indonesia may still encounter hurdles on its way to becoming a major power. There are three internal obstacles identified that have a significant influence on Indonesia's perceived power. First, Indonesia's military prowess remains static and insignificant to support any other foreign relations effort. This assumption is based on the linear correlation between military capabilities and competitive power, where the increase in military power will affect the significant increase in diplomatic clout. Take China's case as an example, with its military showcase in the South China Sea that fully supports Beijing's bigger agenda, Nevertheless, the presence of military strength might not have any influence when it is projected inwardly instead of outwardly.

For Indonesia, its inclusion into the category of major powers depends on support from other factors, such as economic and policy support, which is considered not yet optimal. Moreover, Indonesia's defense strategy may still be shaped as a continental strategy instead of the maritime one (Chandramohan, 2016). Meanwhile, the predominant environment in Southeast Asia is the maritime domain and, for that reason, the reasonable force to be projected is maritime-based force projection with a solid maritime strategy using the archipelagic context as its foundation (Fealy & White, 2016). In addition, Indonesia consists of three-quarters of maritime territory. Therefore, the logical option for Indonesia is to build a defense policy that is archipelagic and maritime-oriented with the capability of outward projection. Indonesia supposedly has a grand maritime vision called the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) that envisages power projection that is aligned with national policy. Nevertheless, this ostentatious vision is yet to be fulfilled and may remain vague or even remain an empty jargon due to the lack of support, planning, and realization from the current administration to include the relevant ministries and institutions (Fealy & White, 2016). The desynchronization between the national vision of the GMF with the defense white paper and the document or doctrines beneath it might conform to the hesitation in the adherence of the GMF since the documents do not reflect the maritime spirit brought by the GMF.

The second aspect is Indonesia's diplomatic capacity to support the national policy of Indonesia's aspiration to be a major power. To flourish as a great power, Indonesia must construct a diplomatic machinery that is more fluid and compatible with other foreign policy regimes. Despite the relatively good score on the ranking, Indonesia has the opportunity to do better. As the present administration's foreign policy shifts to focus more on domestic than international concerns, the obstacles might grow more formidable (Fealy & White, 2016). A self-oriented foreign policy may be beneficial to the country, but it may not be conducive to Indonesia's recognized position. As a large nation, Indonesia should participate in regional or international platforms. Numerous nations, particularly ASEAN members, anticipate Indonesia to play a larger role than it already does. The issue remains, has Indonesia fully fulfilled its diplomatic obligations? This question is not easily answered. Considering Indonesia's position in ASEAN, toward Myanmar, and in the Palestine conflict, it may appear as though Indonesia has done

enough. Concerning Indonesia's projection as a great power and its prospective capabilities, the regarded adequate diplomatic efforts may become difficult.

The synchronization of domestic politics with the desired foreign policy is the third and most important aspect. Indonesia must link its internal politics with its foreign policies to become a more competitive nation. There is a conflict between domestic and international policy. An increasing desire compels Indonesia, on the one hand, to continue the route to becoming a big power. For this reason, Indonesia must increase its international communication channels. On the other hand, some domestic aspirations wish to preserve Indonesia from external influences that may corrode its traditional values (Fealy & White, 2016). A clear example of the contradiction is the different perspective on how to respond to Israel's participation in the U-20 World Cup which ended up with the World Football Authority (FIFA) removing Indonesia as the host of that event. A double standard of treatment is used when it comes to a sensitive issue such as Israel, where foreign policy and internal political dynamics do not align. Similarly, the policy of restraint may serve Indonesia well domestically, but it will not result in beneficial consequences for the nation's route to becoming a major power.

Until the administration attentively addresses these three factors, it is improbable that Indonesia will budge from its current position as a middle-power country. This position tends to be marginalized from the global power dynamics, let alone towards the great power status competing for influence in the region. Indonesia must comprehend the strategic environment shift from unipolar to multipolar power dynamics assuming that Indonesia aims to be a major power. The anticipation is probably apparent with the flexible hedging strategy deployed toward the power dynamics constellation.

Meanwhile, Indonesia is considering a security cooperation partnership with both great powers in the military relationship aspect. However, the Indonesian military inclines toward trusting the U.S. more than China in military cooperation, including operation, procurement, and education. The Indonesian military (The Indonesian National Armed Forces, known by the abbreviation TNI-*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*) weighs that security engagement with China is less valuable than a similar engagement with the U.S. counterparts (Blank, 2021). However, this security engagement with China may have a changed tone with China's People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLA-N) unusual involvement, taking the example of the recovery effort of the sunken submarine KRI Nanggala-402 off the coast of Northern Bali Island, Indonesia, despite the previous similar engagement provided by countries, namely Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia (Emot, 2021). Nevertheless, this engagement is too premature of an indicator to conclude that there is a shift in TNI's attitude towards its Chinese counterparts. The tension and skirmishes between Indonesia's security forces with China in the North Natuna Sea may remain the main factor determining the permanent change of tone. Indonesia holds sovereignty at the core of its national interest. This tension is the reason behind renaming the southern part of the South China Sea to the North Natuna Sea since it falls under Indonesia's territory (Mubah, 2019). In part, it is Indonesia's strategy to disrupt China's claims over parts of the region and affirms Indonesia's de facto status over the area.

In terms of the U.S., Indonesia considers that the U.S. is more transparent and reliable than China (Seah et al., 2023). However, Indonesia expresses concern about the possibility of U.S. sanctions toward the Indonesian military due to many aspects, including the perceived violation of human rights and the procurement from U.S. adversarial countries such as Russia. This specific U.S. approach may result in a counter-productive relationship with Indonesia in the long term (Blank, 2021). In general, Indonesia strives to maintain a security partnership that is as balanced as feasible within the context of a free and active policy. This approach is not limited to the U.S. and China. Interestingly, this approach is also shared by many nations in the region, including Australia, which all want a balanced and positive relationship with the great powers. At the end of the spectrum of power dynamics, it widens to include other nations, such as U.S. allies, and China's adversaries, such as Russia and Iran. Due to its nonaligned policy, neither the United States nor China can expect Indonesia to take a side in any struggle between blocs.

This stance is also related to Indonesia's position as the head of ASEAN, where Indonesia's tendency towards a specific bloc might bring turmoil to the region's foreign policy. It seems that Indonesia is romancing the past of having initiated the non-aligned movement as the middle way during the heated Cold War. However, the balanced approach, such as Indonesia's free and active policy, is the safest approach considering Indonesia's geopolitics and geoeconomics crossroads location and the current world dynamics. Affiliation with a single alliance would only weaken Indonesia's strategic position vis-à-vis the big power states. Therefore, Indonesia will place itself at a safe distance to reduce competition between the region's superpowers. Moreover, Indonesia will likely employ ASEAN's strategy and principles to address GPC throughout the region. Indonesia's foreign policy has been continually guided by its concept of active independence in response to regional and global events. Indonesia's objective has been accomplished by treating ties with all major nations equally while having its national interests at heart.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATION

The contemporary Great Power Competition (GPC) is a contest between the United States, China, and Russia for influence and hegemony. Among these three big powers, competition between the United States and China will undoubtedly predominate in the future, particularly in the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia. Indications that China is a revisionist power are quite significant. The findings from the Lowy Institute and the ISEAS reinforce the contention that the United States remains the strongest nation in the area. However, China has acquired several skills, particularly in the economic realm. Therefore, China displays a clear aim to assume the U.S.'s regional sphere of influence in the future.

Indonesia shares the same anxiety as the United States and other Southeast Asian nations over China's aggressiveness in Southeast Asia, particularly in light of the tension in the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, the remainder of the region, and its relations with the U.S. Nonetheless, evaluating its economic connection and national interests,

Indonesia is unlikely to direct an opt-out balance towards China. This viewpoint is shared by the countries of Southeast Asia since China's expanding economic and political influence is inevitable. Surprisingly, Australia adopts a similar position, despite being the traditional and maybe largest supporter of the United States in Southeast Asia and the Oceania area. Instead of choosing a side that might be detrimental in the long run, most nations in the area choose to have a positive connection with both power states. Considering Indonesia's national interest as the head of ASEAN and its regional capabilities, it is highly probable that the country would retain its nonalignment foreign policy and autonomous and active ideology. Therefore, it provides room for movement inside the international constellation.

For recommendation, concerning the aspirations to bring Indonesia onto the path of becoming a major power within the global power spectrum, the national vision of GMF contains that aspiration. This vision may sound like fulfilling Indonesia's natural prophecy, considering its potential capacity to achieve major power status. Therefore, a solid and sound strategy encompassing all measures and factors mentioned in the discussion section should be developed under the auspices of the government with the support of all national stakeholders, with the defense ministry as the leading institution in this matter. A holistic perspective is necessary to view the problem as a system where the components within are related to one another. This recommendation sounds utopian but is the most reasonable one.

However, the strategy's implementation may also have to impede limitations. The obvious and most significant is the hesitance of some of the state apparatus within the government to support the vision, which is quite disconcerting because it would throw the grand vision and aspirations into disarray. In addition, there are three factors that Indonesia needs to address. The propensity of inward-looking military capabilities, diplomatic competence, and an out-of-sync relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy are the most probable causes of these issues. As long as the inconsistency in national policy persists, it is inconceivable for Indonesia to become a major power. Notably, the dynamic transformation of the strategic environment in the era of GPC may need a more active and robust outward-oriented foreign policy to hedge or perhaps balance the pressure from the big powers. Consequently, Indonesia needs to reconsider its general policy course regarding the three realms of national resources, performance, and military capabilities in achieving a higher status within the power dynamics spectrum and begin to orchestrate the national vision with the projection of national elements of power.

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