



SOUTH ASIA'S GEOPOLITICAL & STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT

India and China in Southeast Asia

Edited by Amit Ranjan · Diotima Chatteraj ·
AKM Ahsan Ullah



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South Asia's Geopolitical & Strategic Engagement

Series Editors

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Asia has emerged as a new arena for global power competition, leading South Asia to gain heightened geostrategic and geopolitical importance. To outmanoeuvre one another, major powers are actively developing extensive connectivity routes and alternative networks. Concurrently, these influential nations are enticing smaller, less developed South Asian countries with loans, grants, and other forms of assistance to foster infrastructure development and economic progress. Within these dynamics of geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic competition among global powers, smaller South Asian nations find themselves entangled.

Historically, these smaller countries have endeavoured to maintain a delicate equilibrium in their relationships with the two dominant Asian powers, India and China. However, the escalating political tensions between New Delhi and Beijing have placed constraints on their previous policy choices and practices. Considering this evolving regional landscape, this series aims to:

- a. Examine how the geostrategic importance of South Asian countries is attracting the interest of extra-regional powers.
- b. Analyse the reasons behind smaller South Asian countries abstaining from taking sides and explore how they strive to strike a balance between the major powers.
- c. Investigate the impact of the geo-economic rivalry between major powers on the smaller South Asian countries.

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FOREWORD

The competition underpinning Sino-Indian relations is multifaceted, spanning geopolitical, economic, and strategic dimensions. Geopolitically, both nations vie for influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its investments in neighboring countries like Pakistan (through the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor) and Sri Lanka have raised Indian concerns about encirclement. Conversely, India's Act East Policy and its involvement in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad (with the US, Japan, and Australia) aim to counterbalance China's dominance.

Economically, China and India are major trading partners, but there is a significant trade imbalance favoring China. India has sought to reduce its dependence on Chinese goods through initiatives like “Atmanirbhar Bharat” (Self-Reliant India). Additionally, India has resisted joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) due to concerns over Chinese economic dominance.

Strategically, the border disputes, particularly the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, underscore the persistent territorial tensions. Both countries have ramped up military infrastructure and deployments along their disputed borders. In Southeast Asia, both nations compete for strategic partnerships and influence, with China's aggressive economic investments contrasting with India's strategic and cultural engagements.

Overall, the Sino-Indian rivalry is becoming serious, impacting regional stability and global geopolitics. It is in this context that China and

India's contestation in Southeast Asia reflects their broader strategic and economic interests in the region, marked by a blend of competition and cooperation. This contestation can be understood through various lenses, including geopolitical strategies, economic engagements, and soft power influence.

For China, the South China Sea is a major focal point as it seeks to assert extensive territorial claims backed by military installations on artificial islands. China's BRI includes the Maritime Silk Road, aiming to enhance connectivity and trade routes through Southeast Asia, cementing its influence in the region. China's growing military presence in the region, including naval exercises and defense agreements with countries like Cambodia and Laos, aims to project power and secure its maritime interests.

India's Act East Policy seeks to strengthen ties with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). India's strategic interest lies in ensuring freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, countering China's dominance. India's involvement in regional forums like the East Asia Summit and the Quad reflects its commitment to a rules-based order in Southeast Asia. India has enhanced its military cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, conducting naval exercises like SIMBEX (with Singapore) and coordinated patrols with Indonesia. India's defense exports to Southeast Asia have also increased as it aims to balance China's influence.

New Delhi's advocacy for a rules-based international maritime order, especially its emphasis on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), reflects a stance against unilateral actions that threaten regional stability. This stance, while rooted in India's principled foreign policy approach, also indirectly challenges China's expansive territorial claims and activities in the South China Sea and reflects India's positioning of itself as a responsible stakeholder committed to regional stability and security.

China's economic dominance in the region remains strong as it is the largest trading partner for many Southeast Asian countries, heavily investing in infrastructure projects under the BRI. Countries like Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia have received significant Chinese investments in sectors ranging from railways to ports. Through initiatives like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), China offers development loans and aid, albeit often strategically tailored.

While India's economic footprint is smaller compared to China, it is growing. India has engaged in trade agreements with ASEAN and invested in infrastructure projects like the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway to enhance connectivity. India's outreach aims to diversify its trade relations and reduce reliance on China. India provides capacity-building assistance and development aid focused on human resource development, healthcare, and education. India's approach is often viewed as more benign and cooperative.

Where the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia plays a significant role in facilitating economic ties and fostering cultural linkages, the Indian diaspora, especially in countries like Malaysia and Singapore, helps in strengthening bilateral relations and promoting Indian culture. In recent years, New Delhi has strongly promoted engagement with the diaspora.

The Sino-India rivalry in Southeast Asia is still subtle and not overt but it can lead to geopolitical tensions, with smaller Southeast Asian nations often caught in the middle. Issues like the South China Sea disputes and competition for resources can exacerbate regional instability. Both China and India can potentially collaborate on regional stability initiatives, disaster relief, and combating transnational threats like piracy and terrorism. ASEAN's centrality in the regional architecture offers a platform for both powers to engage constructively.

In this age of the Indo-Pacific, the strategic convergence between India and Southeast Asia has evolved dramatically shaped by common concerns regarding maritime security, terrorism, and the changing balance of power. India's strategic partnerships with countries like Vietnam and the Philippines have deepened security cooperation, particularly in areas such as counterterrorism, defense technology, and maritime surveillance. Moreover, India's "Act East" policy emphasizes connectivity projects, such as the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, which aim to enhance regional connectivity and promote economic development.

The emergence of a strategic dimension in India's outreach to the East is a relatively recent phenomenon. Launched in 2014, the "Act East" Policy has sought to give a more proactive and action-oriented focus to Indian engagements in East and Southeast Asia by deepening economic integration, expanding strategic partnerships, and fostering cultural and people-to-people ties with countries in the region. By deepening its engagement with countries in Southeast Asia and beyond, India seeks to play a more prominent role in shaping the evolving geopolitical dynamics

of the region while advancing its own national interests and objectives. And China has been a big factor behind this evolution.

The contestation between China and India in Southeast Asia is a complex interplay of strategic, economic, and cultural factors. This book which brings together a mix of young and established academics is a valuable addition to the literature on the Chinese and Indian engagements in various parts of Asia. It covers a huge ground and seeks to answer some critical questions as we seek to comprehend better the importance of this vital geography called Southeast Asia for China and India.

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Indonesia's Engagement with China and India: Pragmatic or Ideational?

Anak Agung Banyu Perwita and Peni Hanggarini

INTRODUCTION

The strategic geographical positioning of Indonesia, China, and India, as the two Asian major powers, holds the potential to underpin a broad spectrum of geopolitical interests, fostering cooperation among these nations. China, leveraging its proximity, has effectively bolstered its global influence by extending benefits to Southeast Asian nations. However, the significance of India—China's neighbor—should not be underestimated, given its remarkable strides in economic development. India articulated the vision of “*a secure, prosperous, and robust New India*” under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership in 2017, further crystallizing it into

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the “*New India 2025*” strategy in 2018. Complementing this vision, India has launched initiatives such as “*Made in India*” and “*Digital India*.”

While Indonesia’s relations with China and India hold considerable significance, they have been marked by certain historical milestones. Indonesia initially established diplomatic ties with China on April 13, 1950, yet these relations were interrupted on October 30, 1967, following the tragic events of September 30, 1965. This event—wherein the Indonesian Communist Party orchestrated the assassination of seven Indonesian generals and attempted to overthrow President Sukarno—led to the suspension of bilateral relations. However, under the presidency of Suharto, Indonesia reinitiated diplomatic relations with China in 1990.

Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms from 1978 to 1992 heralded significant political transformations in China, prompting Indonesia to reconsider its engagement with a more open and pragmatic China. Nonetheless, bilateral cooperation between the two nations experienced a setback during the May 1998 riots, during which numerous ethnic Chinese in Indonesia reportedly faced discrimination and sexual violence. Subsequently, the Chinese government urged the Indonesian authorities to investigate these crimes and ensure the protection of ethnic Chinese individuals residing in Indonesia (Embassy, 2004).

Conversely, over the years, bilateral relations between India and Indonesia have experienced significant improvement since their respective independence. Following independence, leaders of both nations, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sukarno, forged a cooperative pact aimed at combating colonialism and laying the groundwork for a new global order. Notably, in 1955, India and Indonesia, alongside several other nations, convened the Bandung Conference—a pivotal event that laid the foundation for the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. This movement was conceived with the objectives of promoting independence, alleviating poverty, fostering economic development, and opposing colonialism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism. (Fig. 12.1)

The geographical positioning of Indonesia, China, and India on the map of Asia underscores the significance of bilateral relations in shaping their interactions. Both China and India strategically engage with Southeast Asia, including through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to advance their interests in the region. Despite this common goal, the approaches taken by these two giants differ. China employs a competitive strategy aimed at forestalling India’s ascendancy



Fig. 12.1 Map of Asia: Geographical Location of Indonesia, China, and India
(*Source* freepik.com [copyright-free])

and thwarting the expansion of India's cooperation with other South-east Asian countries. Conversely, India perceives China as a threat to its security and prosperity. In response, India emphasizes arms trade and the development of maritime cooperation capabilities as essential components of its strategy to compete with China in the region (Chuong et al., 2022).

The discourse presented in this chapter is anchored in the concept of national interests, which encompasses a comprehensive set of objectives and goals prioritized by a nation in its foreign relations and the management of international affairs. These interests span diverse realms including political, economic, security, ideological, and cultural dimensions, all deemed critical for ensuring the well-being, security, and prosperity of the nation and its populace. Within the framework of India, China, and Indonesia relations, an exploration of their shared histories, geographical proximity, cultural dynamics, and ideological underpinnings serves as pivotal factors shaping their past and current state of affairs.

This chapter delves into Indonesia's engagements with China and India—the prominent Asian powers. It investigates Indonesia's shared interests with China and India, the influence of political conflicts between these two giants on their interactions with Indonesia, and the impact of

the Chinese and Indian diasporas on bilateral relationships. The chapter contends that the strategic geographical positioning of Indonesia, China, and India harbors the potential to cultivate a diverse array of geopolitical interests, laying the groundwork for cooperative endeavors among these nations. However, the dynamic between Indonesia and China leans toward pragmatism rather than idealism, whereas relations with India exhibit a more pronounced ideological orientation.

COMMON INTERESTS BETWEEN CHINA AND INDONESIA

Indonesia's bilateral relations with China have oscillated between mild indifference and outright hostility. China has leveraged its stronger negotiating position to foster economic ties with Indonesia. Nonetheless, China shares economic interests with Indonesia and actively participates in various ASEAN initiatives. Notably, China has demonstrated its support for the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Meeting by hosting the conference in 2000. Additionally, in 2010, China backed the ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus). In a significant move, China and ASEAN jointly conducted their first naval exercise in 2018 (Dodgson, 2021).

As the two nations celebrate a decade of strategic partnership, Indonesia and China are expanding their bilateral relations, underscoring China's economic relevance to Indonesia (Parameswaran, 2023). China stands as Indonesia's most crucial trading partner, with the total trade volume reaching USD 123.4 billion in 2021. Furthermore, China emerged as the third-largest investor in Indonesia in 2021, with a realized investment of USD 3.2 billion. This trend continued in 2022, with China becoming the second-highest investor in Indonesia. These developments signify a shared interest in trade between China and Indonesia (Kemlu, 2022).

Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the idea of establishing long-term cooperation to build the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in a speech delivered to the Indonesian Parliament on October 3, 2013. This proposal reflects an enhanced level of cooperation between the two nations, as evidenced by bilateral visits. For instance, Indonesian President Joko Widodo visited Chengdu, China, on July 27, 2023, upon an invitation by Chinese President Xi Jinping to discuss various investment projects.

Subsequently, President Jokowi embarked on a state visit to China from October 16 to 18, 2023, before attending the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) forum. This visit led to the establishment of the China-Indonesia High-Level Dialogue and Cooperation Mechanism (HDCM) (Joint Statement on Deepening Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation between the People's Republic of China & the Republic of Indonesia, 2023).

Indonesia's trade relations with China are thriving, exemplified by the favorable trade balance between the two countries, reported by the Ministry of Trade Republic of Indonesia. As depicted in Fig. 12.2, Indonesia recorded a surplus of USD 1.24 billion in trade with China, a stark improvement compared to the previous year's deficit of USD 2.82 billion (Perdagangan, 2023b).

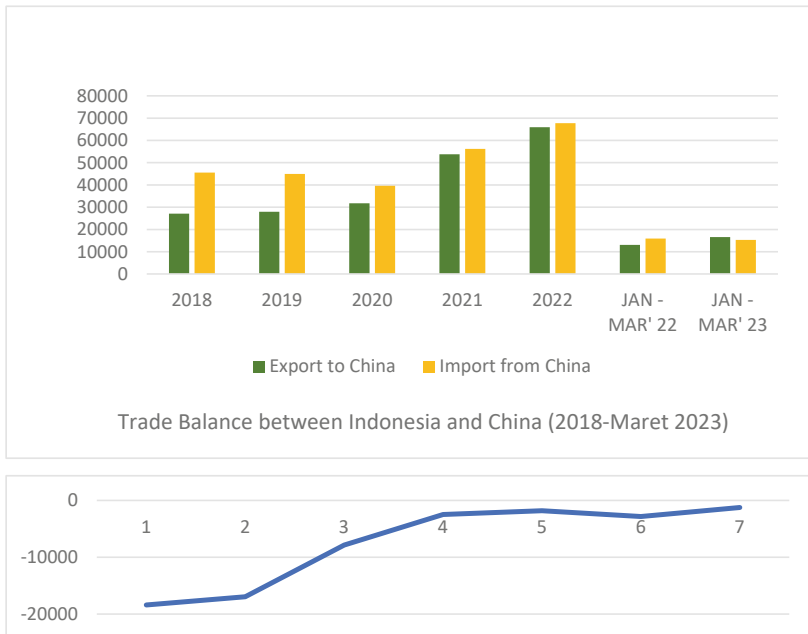
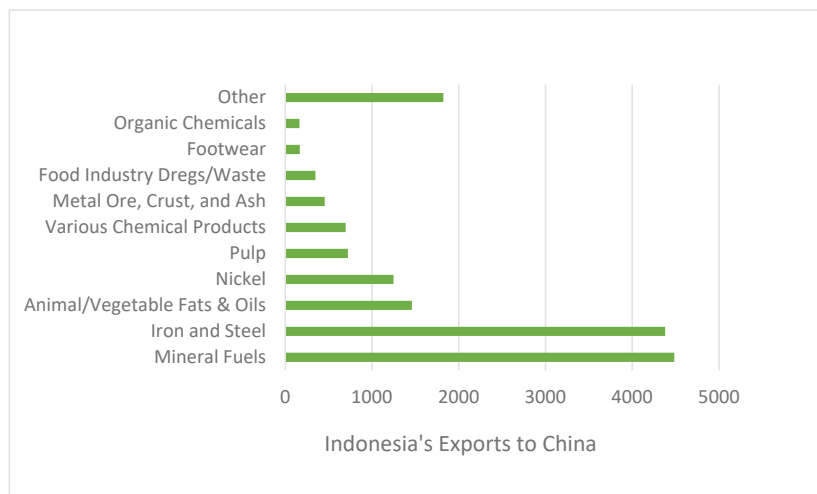


Fig. 12.2 Trade Balance between Indonesia and China (2018—March 2023) (Source [Perdagangan, 2023b])

Table 12.1 Indonesia's exports to china

<i>Product</i>	<i>Million USD</i>
Mineral Fuels	4483.89
Iron and Steel	4379.06
Animal/Vegetable Fats & Oils	1460.17
Nickel	1248.12
Pulp	723.11
Various Chemical Products	696.78
Metal Ore, Crust, and Ash	454
Food Industry Dregs/Waste	348.23
Footwear	167.64
Organic Chemicals	164.95
Other	1823.09



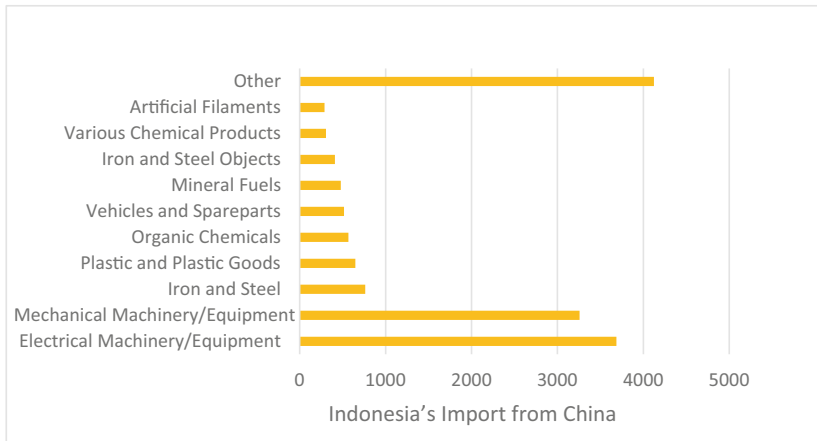
Source: Perdagangan, 2023b

Mineral fuels, iron, and steel constitute Indonesia's primary export commodities to China, comprising 88.57% of Indonesia's total non-oil exports to China (Perdagangan, 2023b) (Table 12.1).

In contrast, the main non-oil and gas commodities imported from China to Indonesia during the January–March 2023 period were electrical equipment and mechanical machinery, as illustrated in Table 12.2.

Table 12.2 Indonesia's Imports from China

<i>Product</i>	<i>Million USD</i>
Electrical Machinery/Equipment	3686.45
Mechanical Machinery/Equipment	3256.87
Iron and Steel	762.32
Plastic and Plastic Goods	646.98
Organic Chemicals	566.3
Vehicles and Spareparts	514.84
Mineral Fuels	478.95
Iron and Steel Objects	410.03
Various Chemical Products	306.36
Artificial Filaments	287.85
Other	4,123.19



Source: Perdagangan, 2023b

COMMON INTERESTS BETWEEN INDIA AND INDONESIA

Indonesia's trade balance with India presents a distinct picture. From January to June 2023, Indonesia experienced a surplus of USD 5.4 billion in trade with India. This surplus primarily stemmed from a surplus of USD 61 billion in the non-oil and gas sector, counterbalanced by a deficit of USD 0.8 billion in the oil and gas sector (Perdagangan, 2023a) (Table 12.3).

Table 12.3 Trade balance between Indonesia and India

No	Description	Million USD						JAN	JUN	2023	Change (%)	Trend (%)	Share (%)
		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	23/22						
I	Export	13.7	11.8	10.4	13.3	23.4	11.5	9.4	17.87	12.57	100		
	-Oil & Gas	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0	0	93.26	12.22	0.03		
II	-Non Oil & Gas	13.7	11.7	10.2	13.1	23.3	11.4	9.4	17.62	12.52	99.97		
	Import	5	4.3	3.8	7.7	9.3	5.2	4.1	22.28	19.96	100		
III	-Oil & Gas	0.1	0.2	0	0.9	2.2	1.3	0.8	39.46	108.34	19.72		
	-Non Oil & Gas	4.9	4.1	3.7	6.8	7.1	3.9	3.3	16.45	13.43	80.28		
IV	Trade Balance	8.7	7.5	6.6	5.7	14	6.2	5.4	14.18	6.94	100		
	-Oil & Gas	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.7	2.1	1.3	0.8	37.88	-	14.9		
IV	-Non Oil & Gas	8.8	7.6	6.5	6.3	16.1	7.5	6.1	18.22	10.92	114.9		
	Total Trades	18.7	16.1	14.2	21	32.7	16.7	13.5	19.25	14.77	100		
	-Oil & Gas	0.2	0.3	0.3	1.1	2.3	1.4	0.8	40.95	88.17	5.96		
	-Non Oil & Gas	18.6	15.8	13.9	19.9	30.4	15.3	12.7	17.32	12.96	94.04		

Source: Perdagangan, 2023a

Indonesia's exports to India encompass a variety of non-oil and gas products, as detailed in Table 12.4 (Perdagangan, 2023a). Conversely, Table 12.5 delineates Indonesia's imports from India in the non-oil and gas sector (Perdagangan, 2023a).

India and Indonesia share strategic perspectives dating back to the Cold War era, both opting for non-alignment between the Western and Communist Blocs. This ideological similarity has laid a robust foundation for the burgeoning bilateral relations. Furthermore, following the events of September 1965, both nations have come to perceive China as an emerging threat in the region (Brewster, 2011).

Table 12.4 Indonesia's Exports to India

<i>Product</i>	<i>Year over year</i>
1. Jewelry/Gems	3241.82%
2. Nickel	169.21%
3. Coffee, Tea, Spices	51.13%
4. Fish and shrimp	49.95%
5. Vehicles and their parts	45.04%

5 Non-Oil and Gas Export Products with the Highest Growth in 2023

Source: Perdagangan, 2023a

Table 12.5 Indonesia's Imports from India

<i>Product</i>	<i>Year Over Year</i>
1. Iron and steel objects	549.88%
2. Vehicle components	423.20%
3. Optical Devices	123.92%
4. Food Industry Dregs/Waste	123.48%
5. Vehicles and their parts	80.13%

5 Non-Oil and Gas Import Products
with the Highest Increases in 2023

Source Perdagangan, [2023a](#)

India's perception of Indonesia differs from that of Vietnam, Japan, or Australia, as it does not view Indonesia as a strong candidate for initiatives aimed at balancing China. Indonesia appears hesitant to provoke Beijing, and it demonstrates a reluctance to embrace a larger security role for India in the Malacca Straits region. Moreover, both India and Indonesia have yet to make significant strides in advancing meaningful arms sales, thus serving as limiting factors for greater strategic convergence between the two countries (Harold et al., 2019).

Furthermore, a more balanced and mutually beneficial relationship characterizes India-Indonesia relations. Both democratic nations consider the Indian Ocean as strategically significant for political, educational, defense, and maritime security purposes. Additionally, they share common

interests in the South China Sea and the broader Indo-Pacific region. Bilateral relations between India and Indonesia leverage a combination of soft power and hard power influences to foster cooperation (Bandono et al., 2021).

A shared ideational foundation between India and Indonesia lies in their significant roles in the maritime sector, both serving as guardians of crucial maritime chokepoints. Under the leadership of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indonesian President Joko Widodo, bilateral relations between the two nations have witnessed substantial enhancement. Initiatives launched during the Modi and Jokowi administrations have played a pivotal role in the development of bilateral relations, with maritime cooperation emerging as a key area of focus.

Jokowi's Global Maritime Fulcrum initiative aims to position Indonesia as a prominent maritime force, while Modi's maritime and diplomatic strategy, known as SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), involves negotiating naval logistical agreements with various countries in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). Notably, initiatives such as SAGAR, the Sagarmala Project, and Project "Mausam," which share similar objectives to Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum, have been launched under Modi's leadership (Aufiya, 2022).

Modi and Jokowi have engaged in discussions regarding initiatives aimed at enhancing maritime connectivity between the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Sumatra. In May 2018, the "Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" underscored the importance of maritime connectivity between these islands, alongside broader marine resource development objectives. This collaborative effort highlights the existing security framework within the boundaries of ASEAN, encompassing various initiatives aimed at fostering regional security and stability, including joint naval operations (Behera, 2021).

Moreover, in Narendra Modi's administration, strategic engagement with numerous countries is characterized by a pragmatic approach that seeks to balance Nehruvian principles based on Panchsheel and Hindutva values. This approach aims to contextualize India's ancient Hindu civilizational heritage and leverage the ancient Hindu value of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* to position India as a proactive leader in advancing peace and stability in contemporary global politics (Robby, 2022).

The parallel trajectory of the governments of Modi and Jokowi illuminates the similarities between India and Indonesia. Both leaders hail from modest backgrounds in the manufacturing and infrastructure sectors.

However, while India adopts an assertive and strategic foreign policy to assert its position on the global stage, Indonesia tends to adopt a more inward-looking approach as a regional leader (Gill & Yosari, 2023). Nevertheless, the governments of Modi and Jokowi share a common vision regarding maritime cooperation (Izzuddin & Mohan, 2019).

Modi's visit to Indonesia in 2018 resulted in the signing of a comprehensive strategic partnership and a new defense cooperation agreement. Subsequently, India and Indonesia launched a joint naval exercise called "*Samudra Shakti*." The Indian Navy was actively involved in humanitarian and disaster relief operations following the Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami in Palu in 2018. Additionally, both countries are exploring potential cooperation in the Air Force domain. Efforts are underway to bolster trade and travel links, particularly between Indonesia's Aceh Province and India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Furthermore, the two nations are collaborating on joint infrastructure projects, such as the development of the Sabang Port in Aceh Province. This initiative may be perceived as India's response to China's BRI (Grossman, 2023).

India's status as a security partner for the US emphasizes the significance of Indonesia's bilateral relations with India in maintaining favorable ties with the US. Despite this, India also adheres to a good neighborhood policy, although its engagement in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) has been somewhat limited (Baruah, 2022).

THE IMPACTS OF CHINA-INDIA POLITICAL TENSIONS ON ENGAGEMENT WITH INDONESIA

This section delves into how the political tensions between China and India have influenced the engagement of these two Asian giants with Indonesia. These tensions primarily stem from border disputes, with China asserting claims over Indian territory, as well as the enduring effects of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

On a global scale, China and India have displayed cooperation on various issues, including climate change and global trade negotiations, as well as efforts to restructure global financial institutions. However, frictions have emerged in bilateral contexts. China has brought territorial disputes with India to the Asian Development Bank and has even blocked India's application for a loan for development projects in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims as part of its territory (Pant, 2011).

In its approach to dealing with China, India has adopted a multilateral strategy, particularly with countries in East Asia. India has strengthened its relations with the US, Japan, and Australia through initiatives such as the Quad, while also seeking to manage territorial disputes with China (Limaye, 2022).

While China and India maintain significant relations with Russia, the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has had less direct effects on China and India in the short term. However, it is crucial to examine the long-term implications, particularly regarding India's reliance on arms exports from Russia. As Russia may potentially face challenges in supplying arms, India may shift its reliance on the US, which could subsequently alter its approach toward China. Conversely, China may turn to Russia to fulfill its arms supply needs.

To navigate the rivalry between China and India in the Indian Ocean, Indonesia has adopted a hedging strategy. This strategy aims to mitigate risks amidst escalating tensions in the Indian Ocean between the two giants, while also avoiding direct conflict with China and India (Munabari et al., 2021).

Despite China and India's collaborative efforts and attempts to stabilize their relationship, the boundary crisis and their overall relations remain competitive and have the potential to escalate into conflict (Madan, 2020).

CHINESE AND INDIAN DIASPORA AND BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH INDONESIA

The following analysis explores the influence of the Chinese and Indian diaspora in Indonesia on bilateral relations with the country. It is posited in this paper that while diaspora communities may have some impacts, their influence on bilateral relations is not deemed significant.

CHINESE DIASPORA IN INDONESIA AND INDONESIAN DIASPORA IN CHINA

The challenge faced by the Chinese diaspora in Indonesia is to mitigate suspicion toward China. The establishment of the Indonesia Diaspora in China (IDN-China) and the Indonesian Students' Association in the People's Republic of China (ISA-China/PPI Tiongkok), along with other

Indonesian diaspora organizations in China, is expected to strengthen relations between the two countries (Muas, 2023).

As of 2008, there were three to five generations of Chinese diaspora in Indonesia. However, very few members of the Chinese diaspora are involved in politics or government, instead focusing on significant economic investments. Notably, more than three-quarters of Indonesia's 20 wealthiest individuals at the time were of Chinese descent. The Chinese ethnic community played a central role in the Soeharto government, albeit amidst some controversies. Additionally, the Chinese community in Indonesia has historical ties to mainland China (Harding, 2008).

INDIAN DIASPORA IN INDONESIA

For over 2000 years, India and Indonesia have maintained profound cultural ties, with some even suggesting that the name "*Indonesia*" finds its roots in the term "*Indianised*." Indian traders have a historical presence in Indonesia, fostering cultural linkages despite the predominantly Muslim population. Shared cultural values, including those from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* epics, have been embraced and exchanged between the two nations. Furthermore, India played a significant role in supporting Indonesia's struggle for independence.

In its engagement with Indonesia, India opts for soft power strategies over hard power tactics. Beyond narratives from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, both countries recognize the paramount importance of maritime affairs. Thus, soft power initiatives serve as potent catalysts for fostering bilateral cooperation between India and Indonesia (Vadodara, 2018).

In Narendra Modi's administration, the Indian diaspora worldwide, particularly in Europe, the US, and Singapore, has received increasing acknowledgment, particularly since 2014. Modi has actively engaged with and sought to leverage the Indian diaspora to bolster India's economic growth. However, the Indian diaspora in Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia may have been relatively neglected, especially when compared to China's adept utilization of its diaspora to enhance its economy (Kumar, 2022). Nevertheless, the Indian diaspora in Indonesia has convened in significant forums in cities like Medan and Jakarta, contributing to the Indonesian economy (Gov, 2013).

The Indian diaspora in Indonesia appears to be gradually assimilating into Indonesian society. They can freely observe their ancestors' traditional customs. Unlike the Indian diaspora in Malaysia and Singapore, those in Indonesia seem to be more integrated into social life. However, the Government of India has yet to develop a clear policy for organizing its diaspora in Indonesia. Despite the numerous cultural commonalities between the two countries and the potential for deepening collaboration, a coherent strategy for engaging with the Indian diaspora in Indonesia remains elusive (Azizi, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy principle has enabled it to cultivate cordial relations with both China and India, the two prominent Asian powers, without prejudice. Both China and India perceive Indonesia as a valuable potential partner. The rapport between Indonesia and China has deepened notably since President Joko Widodo assumed office in 2014, with this trend continuing into his second term until 2024. The tenth anniversary of their strategic partnership marks a significant milestone in the evolving relationship between the two countries. Similarly, the 2018 signing of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Narendra Modi and Joko Widodo signifies the deepening engagement between Indonesia and India.

While China and Indonesia prioritize pragmatic economic objectives, India and Indonesia share more idealistic security visions and goals. Despite political disparities between China and India, these differences have not impeded their interactions with Indonesia. In addition, despite ongoing border disputes between China and India, as well as India's security alliance with the US, bilateral relations between China and Indonesia and between India and Indonesia remain largely unaffected.

Furthermore, China and Indonesia share common interests akin to those between India and Indonesia. Indonesia's engagements with these two prominent Asian nations have significantly shaped its pursuit of national interests. Compared to its relations with India, Indonesia's relations with China have yielded more substantial outcomes, particularly in terms of economic cooperation and infrastructure investment. Nevertheless, Indonesia and India harbor numerous shared visions and potential avenues for future collaboration. Maritime security and the principle of

non-alignment stand out as common interests that can foster greater collaboration between the two countries.

The Chinese and Indian diasporas in Indonesia have showcased strong cultural ties that have influenced bilateral relations. However, the impacts of these ties have varied. The Chinese diaspora in Indonesia wields considerably more economic influence than the Indian diaspora. While the cultural bond between Indians and Indonesians has been formalized through specific cultural groups, the Indian diaspora in Indonesia may need to intensify its engagement to further promote people-to-people diplomacy in bilateral relations with Indonesia.

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