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NOTES FROM THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Yohanes Sulaiman

As the executive editor, I welcome our readers to our inaugural issue of Journal of Global Strategic Studies.

Journal of Global Strategic Studies aims to become one of the preeminent journals in Political Science, specifically in the subfields of international relations, comparative politics, and area studies. At this point, we publish issues twice a year, in June and in December. Depending on the number of submissions, we may be increasing the frequency of our publication in the future.

We welcome submissions on foreign policy, security studies, democracy, and political psychology – anything that is interesting and high quality relating to global strategic studies. As we also aim to inform policy makers and stimulate debates in political science, we are publishing both research articles and essays – so this journal will be part academic and part policy journal. We also welcome and will publish book reviews and short essays that question the findings and arguments in articles that we published.

We are honored that several distinguished scholars have contributed articles to the first issue of Journal of Global Strategic Studies.

The lead article comes from John Mueller, a senior research scientist at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies, a member of in the Department of Political Science at the Ohio State University, and also a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. Like much of his previous work, his article, "International War: Decline, Consequences, and 'Pax Americana,'" is both fascinating and controversial, as it declares that the world is presently relatively peaceful not due to American primacy, but because states no longer think war as something normal and desirable. Truly, this article is perfect for the inaugural issue of this journal.

Saiful Mujani, Professor in Political Science at Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta and R. William Liddle, Emeritus Professor in Political Science at the Ohio State University collaborated to give us our first article in Comparative Studies, on democratic deconsolidation. Facing the arguments that democracy is declining all over the world, including in Indonesia, Mujani and Liddle set forth a reassuring argument, asserting that economic performance and level of education are both important factors in maintaining support for democracy. Considering that the level of education continues to increase in Asian countries, the future trend for democracy is encouraging.

Leonard C. Sebastian, Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Indonesia Programme, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University and Sigit S. Nugroho, a Research Analyst, at the Indonesia Programme, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, assess U.S. grand strategy in Southeast Asia. They argue that newly elected U.S. President Joe Biden will pursue a selective grand strategy, in which he will focus on China while paying less attention to Southeast Asia. This article offers invaluable insights for decision makers in capitals throughout Southeast Asia.

John Blaxland, Professor of International Security and Intelligence Studies at the Australian National University, argues that despite ups and downs in relations between Australia and Indonesia, both countries still share so many overlapping interests that it would be best for both countries to deepen and broaden their bilateral relationship, particularly through more bilateral and multilateral engagement. Blaxland's argument is timely and his advice is sound and important, considering growing tensions in the region due to the increased assertiveness of China. Additionally, in light of the observations made by Sebastian and Nugroho, that United States may de-emphasize Southeast Asia,

Blaxland's claims take on added urgency. Therefore, this article is a must-read for decision-makers in Jakarta and Canberra.

Alexander R. Arifianto, a Research Fellow at the Indonesia Programme, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, wrote an impressive article that discusses the politics of the Nahdlatul Ulama, considered by many as a large, respected, and moderate Islamic organization in Indonesia, famous for setting up youths to protect churches from attacks by radicals and terrorists. He makes a sober argument that questions the "moderate" thesis, contending that with the rise of conservative Islamism in Indonesia, the Nahdlatul Ulama has embraced illiberal policies and tactics against its conservative opponents, notably by aligning itself with the current Indonesian President Joko Widodo and using the state's apparatus to crack down on its opponents. For those interested in Islam and theories about "democratic backsliding," this article is especially relevant and insightful.

Last but not least, Mariane Olivia Delanova, an associate professor in International Relations at Universitas Jenderal Achmad Yani (UNJANI) and Professor Yanyan Mochamad Yani of Universitas Padjajaran (UNPAD) collaborated on an article analyzing Indonesia's security strategy in Southeast Asia as a middle power.

Finally, allow me to thank you for your time and willingness to read this note, and I do hope that this inaugural edition will be the beginning of a beautiful friendship between us and you, dear readers.

Cimahi and Bandung, June 2021

Yohanes Sulaiman
Executive Editor

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GLOBAL STRATEGIC STUDIES

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INTERNATIONAL WAR: DECLINE, CONSEQUENCES, AND "PAX AMERICANA"

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Abstract

The establishment and maintenance of any existing "world order" is primarily based on a general aversion to international war and does not depend on the United States. This perspective disputes two explanations that rely heavily on American activities. One contends that the United States, aided perhaps by the attention-arresting fear of nuclear weapons, was necessary to provide worldwide security and thus to order the world. The other contends that the United States was instrumental, indeed vital, in constructing international institutions, conventions, and norms, in advancing economic development, and in expanding democracy, and that these processes have crucially helped to establish and maintain a degree of international peace. This article traces the rise of an aversion to international war and argues that this, not US efforts, should be seen as the primary causative or facilitating independent variable in the decline of international war.
This perspective also suggests that world order can survive, or work around, challenges that might be thrown at it by the United States or anyone else, that fears that a rising China or an assertive Russia will upset the order are overdrawn, that there is scarcely any need for the maintenance of a large military force in being, and that, under the right conditions, international anarchy, could well be a desirable state.

Keywords: international war; war aversion; international anarchy; world order.

Introduction

The countries in Europe have managed to remain free from substantial interstate war for 75 years—the longest period of time since Europe itself was invented as a concept some 2,500 years ago (Mueller 2021a). As Oxford University historian

Evan Luard has noted, "Given the scale and frequency of war during the preceding centuries in Europe," this is "a change of spectacular proportions: perhaps the single most striking discontinuity that the history of warfare has anywhere provided" (Luard 1986).

Not only have developed countries, including the Cold War superpowers, managed to stay out of war with each other since 1945, but there have been remarkably few international wars of any sort during that period, particularly in recent decades. Indeed, over the last 30 years, there have been only three international wars as conventionally defined (at least 1000 battle or battle-related deaths). One was waged by Ethiopia and Eritrea in the last years of the 20th century. And the others, the only ones of the present century, are the brief regime-toppling invasions by the United States of Afghanistan and Iraq impelled by 9/11, wars that then devolved into extended counterinsurgency conflicts.

Although states may have largely abstained from conducting wars directly between themselves, the development has not necessarily led to the demise of warlike behavior in total. Indeed, states may well feel freer to engage in activities that might once have been taken to be a potential *casus belli*. Thus they still contest at other, less lethal, levels. These include tinkering in civil wars, seizing tiny bits of territory, firing shots across bows, lobbing cyber balloons, exacting economic sanctions, engaging in coercive economic diplomacy, attempting covert regime change, and poaching fish (Altman 2020; Braumoeller 2019). And civil wars continue, though perhaps declining somewhat in number since the 1980s (Mueller 2021a).

This article examines possible explanations for the decline of international war. Although the argument can only be sketched in the space available, it disputes those that attribute the decline to US security activities or to a US-led "world order." Rather, the rise of an aversion to international war is the most likely primary reason. Changes in ideas can often have substantial results, and it will be argued that much of the positive development of the post-World War II

era would likely have happened even without much American security participation. Moreover, the establishment of norms and institutions, economic advance, and the progress of democratization are not so much the cause of international peace and an aversion to international war as their consequence.

This perspective also suggests that world order can survive, or work around, challenges that might be thrown at it by the United States or anyone else; that fears that a rising China or an assertive Russia will upset the order are overdrawn; that there is scarcely any need for the maintenance of a large military force in being; and that, under the right conditions, international anarchy could well prove to be an entirely tolerable condition.

"Pax Americana" and the Rise of Aversion to International War

A number of explanations have been advanced by analysts to explain the remarkable decline of international war (Fettweis 2010; Pinker 2011, 2018; Goldstein 2011; Horgan 2012; Gat 2017). This article focuses on two, often but not always related, that claim the decline can be heavily attributed to the activities of the United States.

The first is that the United States has provided worldwide security and thus order, perhaps aided by the attention-arresting fear of nuclear weapons. This is often labelled "Pax Americana," and it relates to hegemonic stability theory in many of its forms. The second is that the United States was vital to construct international institutions, conventions, and norms; to advance economic development; and to expand democracy—and that these processes have ordered the world and crucially helped to establish and maintain international peace.

Along these lines, neoconservative writers Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol (2003) argue that "in many instances, all that stands between civility and genocide, order and mayhem, is American power." And former US national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski (2012) contended that "if America falters," the likely outcome would be "outright chaos" and "a dangerous slide into global

turmoil." The United States, as Princeton's John Ikenberry (2017), writes, is the "guarantor of the world order."

These two explanations essentially rest on a counterfactual that is rarely carefully assessed by its advocates: if the United States had withdrawn from the world after 1945, things would have turned out much differently and, most likely, far worse.

Thus, political scientists Bruce Russett and John Oneal are among those who conclude that it was a US-supported European security community that made armed conflict between France and Germany "unthinkable" after World War II (2001; Thayer 2013). But it is entirely to look at the condition differently. The French and the Germans were once extremely good at getting into wars with each other, but since 1945 there seems to have been no one in either country who has advocated resuming the venerable tradition.

This reflects the fact that over the course of the twentieth century, a significant shift in attitudes toward international war took place—a change that scarcely needed the United States to provide either a militarized security environment built around nuclear fears or a set of norms, institutions, economic exchanges, and democracy. This can perhaps be quantified in a rough sort of content analysis. Before World War I, it was common, even routine, for serious writers, analysts, and politicians in Europe and North America to exalt war between states as beautiful, honorable, holy, sublime, heroic, ennobling, natural, virtuous, glorious, cleansing, manly, necessary, and progressive. At the same time, they declared peace to be debasing, trivial, rotten, and characterized by crass materialism, artistic decline, repellant effeminacy, rampant selfishness, base immorality, petrifying stagnation, sordid frivolity, degrading cowardice, corrupting boredom, bovine content, and utter emptiness (Mueller 1989; Stromberg 1982; Brodie 1973). After the war, in stark contrast, such claims and vivid contentions are almost never heard.

It is not completely clear why World War I was such a turning point. There had been plenty of massively destructive wars before, many of them fought to the point of complete annihilation. And there were plenty that were futile, stupid, and disgusting—mud, leaches, and dysentery were not invented in 1914. One notable change, however, was that World War I was the first war in history to have been preceded by substantial, organized antiwar agitation (Beales 1931; Mueller 1989). Although it was still very much a minority movement and largely drowned out by those who exalted war, its gadfly arguments were persistent and unavoidable, and this may well have helped Europeans and North Americans to look at the institution of war in a new way after the massive conflict of 1914-18. At any rate, within half a decade, war opponents, once a derided minority, became a decided majority.

There were, however, two countries which, in different ways, did not get the message. One was Japan—a less developed but increasingly powerful state that had barely participated in World War I. Many people there could still enthuse over war in a manner than had largely vanished in Europe (Vagts 1959). It took a cataclysmic war for the Japanese to learn the lessons almost all Europeans had garnered from World War I.

The second country was Germany. In contrast to Japan, however, it appears that only one person there was willing to embrace international war, but he proved to be crucial—he was a necessary, though not, of course, a sufficient cause for the war (Mueller 2004, 2018, 2021a). As military historian John Keegan (1989) stresses, "only one European really wanted war: Adolf Hitler:" And historian Gerhard Weinberg (1980) concludes that Hitler was "the one man able, willing, and even eager to lead Germany and drag the world into war."

World War I made large majorities in Europe and North America into unapologetic peace-mongers, at least with regard to international war. Whether one sees Hitler as a necessary cause or not, World War II reinforced that lesson

in those places (probably quite unnecessarily), and it converted the previously militaristic Japanese in Asia.

The Consequences of the Change

Given this growth of aversion to international war, it seems unlikely that the United States, with or without nuclear weapons, was necessary for the international security that emerged after World War II, particularly in the developed world, nor was it required to institute new norms or institutions.

To begin with, as the United States was scarcely required to prevent war between Germany and France, the Cold War would likely have come out much the same no matter what policy the United States pursued. In particular, major conflict would likely have been avoided. As historian Vojtech Mastny (2006) concludes, all Soviet "scenarios presumed a war started by NATO" and "the strategy of nuclear deterrence [was] irrelevant to deterring a major war that the enemy did not wish to launch in the first place."

It could be argued, of course, that this was a consequence of American deterrence policy. However, those holding that deterrence policy was essential need to demonstrate that the Soviets were ever willing to risk anything remotely resembling the catastrophe they had just suffered, whether nuclear or not. In addition, Moscow was under the spell of a theory that said they would eventually come to rule the world in a historically inevitable process to which they would contribute merely by safely inspiring and encouraging like-minded revolutionaries abroad.

Accordingly, it seems unlikely that the United States (or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) was required to avoid war with the Soviet Union. In the end, although the United States did ardently seek to oppose the ideology and its appeals, Communism ultimately self-destructed. Its domestic problems derived from decades of mismanagement and mindless brutality and from fundamental misconceptions about basic economic and social realities. And its foreign policy

failures stemmed from a fundamentally flawed, and often highly romanticized, conception of the imperatives of history and of the degree to which foreign peoples would find appeal in the Communist worldview. As analyst Stobe Talbott (1990) puts it, the Soviet system went "into meltdown because of inadequacies and defects at its core, not because of anything the outside world had done or threatened to do." This suggests that the costly arms race was more nearly an indicator of international Cold War tensions than the cause of them.

Thus, insofar as good things have happened since the end of World War II, American security policy has been more nearly helpful than necessary, and its specific achievements in the twenty-first century have been more in dispensing war and disorder in places like Afghanistan and Iraq than in establishing peace and order.

The United States was certainly helpful after World War II in constructing international rules and institutions, promoting economic trade and development, and expanding democracy. But, as with security arrangements, it was scarcely necessary. The impelling, or facilitating, cause in the process again was the aversion toward international war. As scholar Richard Betts (1992) puts it for institutions of collective security: "peace is the premise of the system, not the product."

If international peace is the general expectation, it becomes much easier to create institutions and to construct rules and conventions intended to be supportive and reinforcing. But it is primarily the deep desire for peace that causes the conventions and rules, not the other way around. It is similar to the way that the rule about driving on one side of the street has been the result, not the cause, of a rather widespread desire to avoid being killed by oncoming traffic.

Thus, many of the institutions that have been fabricated in Europe are among the consequences of the remarkable international peace that has enveloped Western Europe since 1945, not its cause. If Europeans hardly needed the United States to decide that war among them was a really terrible idea, they did not need

it to instill in them the notion that economic development and the quest for its ensuing prosperity was a good one. For example, it was the deep desire for international peace, not American machinations or simple economic considerations that was the impelling force for the creation of the coal and steel community between France and Germany, an arrangement that eventually evolved into the European Union. It is accordingly difficult to see why the institutions should get the credit for the peace that has flourished for the last three-quarters of a century in Europe, but they do (Russett and Oneal 2001; Ikenberry 2001, 2011).

There has also been a great expansion of international trade, interdependence, and communication, but this is more likely to be the consequence of peace than the cause of it. Moreover, any leadership in the process from the United States was substantially due to the huge size of its economy—all it had to do was allow access.

Peace may also furnish countries with the security and space in which to explore and develop democracy because democracy and democratic idea entrepreneurs are more likely to flourish when the trials, distortions, and disruptions of war—whether international or civil—are absent (Pietrzyk 2002; Thompson 1996).

Policy Implications

Over the twentieth century, particularly within the ever-enlarging developed world, something that might be called a culture of peace or an aversion to international war has been established for how countries relate to each other. The United States may not have been crucial for this development, but a number of strategic and policy implications stem from it.

First, because the United States has not been crucial for establishing and maintaining world order, that order can survive, or work around to accommodate or undercut, various challenges that might be thrown at it by the United States—as

during the administration of Donald Trump in recent years. However deflating this conclusion might be to American triumphalists, it is good news more generally: maintaining world order is based on a general aversion to international war and does not depend on the United States.

Second, the remarkable rise in aversion to international war suggests that a major war among developed countries, one like World War II, is extremely unlikely to recur. Contrary to many current fears, it is unlikely that this agreeable condition will be punctured either by the rise of China as a challenger country or by excessive assertiveness by Russia backed by its large nuclear arsenal.

China has become almost the quintessential trading state. Its integration into the world economy and its increasing dependence for economic development and for the consequent acquiescence of the Chinese people are crucial. Armed conflict would be extremely—even overwhelmingly—costly to the country and, in particular, to the regime in charge. The best bet, surely, is that this condition will essentially hold. Indeed, there is a danger of making a China threat into a self-fulfilling prophecy, by refusing to consider both the unlikelihood and the consequences of worst-case scenario fantasizing, and by engaging in endless metaphysical talk about "balancing" (Betts 2012; Kirshner 2020; Mueller 2021b). In addition, analysts point to a large number of domestic problems that are likely to arrest the attention of Chinese leaders in future years (Freeman 2018).

Concerns about Russian assertiveness have escalated since 2014 when there was an extortionary annexation of Crimea, a large peninsular chunk of Ukraine, to Russia, and then a sporadic, and ultimately stalemated, civil war in Ukraine's east. Although the crisis created, as Harvard psychology professor Steven Pinker notes (2015), "just the kinds of tensions that in the past had led to great-power wars," nothing like that took place. Moreover, the Ukraine episode of 2014 seems to be a one-off—a unique, opportunistic, and probably under-considered escapade that proved to be unexpectedly costly to the perpetrators. Massive extrapolation is unjustified and ill-advised (Person 2015; Bandow 2016).

Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping, like Hitler in the 1930s, are appreciated domestically for their success in maintaining a stable political and economic environment. However, unlike Hitler, both are running trading states and need a stable and essentially congenial international condition to flourish (Rosecrance 1986). Most importantly, neither seems to harbor Hitler-like dreams of extensive expansion by military means. It is true that both are leading their countries in an illiberal direction, something that might hamper economic growth, while maintaining a kleptocratic system. But this may be acceptable to populations enjoying historically high living standards and fearful of less stable alternatives. The two leaders (and their publics) do seem to want to overcome what they view as past humiliations. That scarcely seems to present a threat. The United States, after all, continually declares itself to be "the one indispensable nation"—suggesting that all others are, well, dispensable. If the United States is allowed to wallow in such self-important, childish, essentially meaningless, and decidedly fatuous proclamations, why should other nations be denied the opportunity to emit similar inconsequential rattling's?

Third, the rise of an aversion to international war suggests that there is scarcely a need to maintain a large military force by the United States (or pretty much another state). In fact, the achievements of the US military since World War II have not been very impressive. Some continue to maintain that it was the existence of the US military that kept the Soviet Union or China from launching World War III. However, as suggested earlier, the Communist side never saw direct war against the West as being a remotely sensible tactic for advancing its revolutionary agenda. That is, there was nothing to deter. Moreover, for all the very considerable expense, the American military has won no wars during that period—especially if victory is defined as achieving a military objective at an acceptable cost—except against enemy forces that scarcely existed: Grenada, Panama, Kosovo, and Iraq in the Gulf War of 1991.

Maintaining huge and expensive US military force-in-being might make sense, despite the abundant record of failure, if there existed coherent threats that required such a force. Although there are certainly problem areas and issues in the world, none of these seems to present a security threat to the United States large or urgent enough. It may make sense to hedge a bit, however, by judiciously maintaining small contingents of troops for rapid response and for policing functions, a capacity to provide air support for friendly ground troops in localized combat, a small number of nuclear weapons for the (wildly) unlikely event of the rise of another Hitler, something of an effort to deal with cyber, an adept intelligence capacity, and the development of a capacity to rebuild quickly should a sizable threat eventually materialize

And there is a related issue: having a large force tempts leaders to use the military to solve problems for which it is inappropriate, inadequate, and often counterproductive. In the wake of the disastrous Vietnam War, Bernard Brodie (1978) wistfully reflected that "One way of keeping people out of trouble is to deny them the means for getting into it." More than forty years later, Brodie's admonition continues to be relevant.

Conclusion: Anarchy May Well Be Tolerable or Even Desirable

It has often been argued that, as Albert Einstein (1960) insisted, a world government is both an "absolute" and an "immediate" necessity for the demise of international war, something, he suggested, that might emerge naturally out of the United Nations. As it happens, peace between major countries has been maintained and international war more generally has declined remarkably. However, the United Nations deserves little credit for this remarkable development, and world government none at all.

In fact, if the nearly 200 states that constitute the world order come to substantially abandon the idea that international war is a sensible method for solving problems among themselves, the notion that they live in a condition of

"anarchy" becomes misleading. Technically, of course, the concept is accurate: there exists no international government that effectively polices the behavior of the nations of the world. The problem with the word lies in its inescapable connotations: it implies chaos, lawlessness, disorder, confusion, and both random and focused violence (Ellickson 1991; Bull 1977).

If that idea is abandoned—that is, if states understand that international war is not the way we do things anymore—"anarchy" could become a tolerable, or even a desirable, condition. It would be equally accurate to characterize the international situation as "unregulated," a word with connotations that are far different and perhaps far more helpful. What would emerge is what Germany's Hanns Maull (1990/91) calls a "system of cooperation and conflict among highly interdependent partners."

The constituent states may still harbor a great number of problems and disputes to work out. But to work to resolve such problems while avoiding international war, those states would scarcely require an effective world government—or the efforts of a "hegemonic" United States.

And in the meantime, sustaining a bloated military force and anachronistically pursuing self-fulfilling "great-power" rivalries comes at great cost. And it risks undermining efforts to address problems like pandemics and climate change that require international cooperation and scarcely have a military component.

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EXPLAINING DEMOCRATIC DECONSOLIDATION: EVIDENCE FROM ASIAN DEMOCRACIES

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Abstract

Are Asian democracies deconsolidating, in line with world-wide trends? This article examines four consolidated democracies in Asia: Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, plus Indonesia, whose own consolidation has been problematic. Using public opinion data, we evaluate two competing models—civic culture and political economy—to test whether there is a decline in democratic support. We report that the political economy model is more persuasive. Declines in democratic support are associated more consistently with democratic performance and education. Because education levels are tending to rise, and political socialization continues into adulthood, we conclude that there should be little fear that Asian democracies will deconsolidate.

Keywords: Democratic deconsolidation, civic culture, political economy, Asia

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Introduction

"The whole spectrum of regimes in the world is moving in the wrong direction. Liberal democracies … are under pressure of becoming less liberal, less tolerant. Countries that are democracies but maybe not liberal ones … are at very serious risk of sliding back into authoritarian rule. And countries that have been authoritarian are becoming more authoritarian" (Diamond 2017).

"Citizens of democracies are less and less content with their institutions; they are more and more willing to jettison institutions and norms that have

traditionally been regarded as central components of democracy; and they are increasingly attracted to alternative regime forms" (Foa and Mounk 2016, 16).

These two quotations reflect a general conclusion about recent democratic decline, a regression that has occurred in many consolidated democracies. Mass support for democratic institutions has weakened. This sweeping conclusion is alarming, particularly to those who believe that democracy is the best system of government. These trends also stand in contrast to earlier claims that democracy represents "the end of history" (Fukuyama 1992).

Democratic deconsolidation reflects the attitudinal decline in support for democracy as a system and the increase in support for authoritarianism. It is not attributable to negative evaluations of government performance under democratic systems, which previous studies have termed the attitudes of a "critical citizenry." This critical stance is not a threat to democracy, but is instead a sign of a healthy democracy (Norris 1999; Mujani, Liddle, and Ambardi 2018). Other analysts have challenged the basic thesis of decline in support for democracy, arguing that decline is not a universal phenomenon. Consistent with this claim, there have indeed been many fluctuations in support for democracy over time (Inglehart 2016).

The most important aspect of democratic deconsolidation discussed above by Foa and Mounk (2016) is inter-generational. In their view, the future of democracy is threatened, as can be seen in patterns of support for democracy by generations. The millennial generation, compared with its predecessor (or with more senior citizens), is argued to have a predilection towards support for authoritarianism, not democracy. These studies also show that the millennial generation is less engaged in politics, an important indicator because in a democracy political engagement is considered crucial to make the system function well and thus sustain high levels of attitudinal support.

Generations are considered an important unit of analysis because each generation is the product of a unique form of political socialization. The political

attitudes of a generation, including toward democracy, are formed when they are young, which will influence their future political attitudes. If the millennial generation holds negative attitudes toward democracy now, they will continue to hold these attitudes in the future.

Education is a potentially more important factor than generational difference. Education generally has a positive effect on consolidation or support for democracy, as has been shown in many previous studies (Lipset 1959; Norris 1999, 2011). Only if education results in the decline of support for democracy will democracy's future be endangered, because levels of education have been increasing worldwide (UNDP).[1]

We examine this issue by exploring four Asian democracies: Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Indonesia. Using level of freedom measures that are regularly reported by Freedom House, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan are the three Asian democracies that have become the most consolidated to date (Freedom House 2020). Their democratic progress is about the same as previously established democracies in North America and Western Europe. These three cases are therefore highly relevant to the deconsolidation issue. Previous assessments of East Asian democracies have found consolidation particularly in the three countries (Park 2007; McAllister 2016). According to a more recent study, however, Asian democracy is backsliding (Croissant and Diamond 2020). The time is therefore ripe to examine the three democracies again with new data.

Indonesia, a new democracy, was once considered consolidated during the twenty-year period since the restoration of democracy (Liddle and Mujani 2013). Recently, however, Freedom House has concluded that freedom in Indonesia has declined, from Fully Free in 2006-2012, to Partly Free since then (Freedom House 2020; Aspinall et al 2020; Mietzner 2020). The Indonesian case adds new variation to this issue.

[1] https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Global_Educational_Trends_1970-2025.pdf, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdro_statistical_data_table2.pdf

Are their signs of deconsolidation in these four cases? And if so, how can we explain them? We will evaluate the claims of Foa and Mounk that levels of political interest and generational differences are the crucial factors. Other studies find that socioeconomic measures, such as education, strongly predict democratic consolidation (Przeworski et al 2000; Croissant 2007; Lipset 1959). Political economy is yet another explanation. In this model, support for a regime such as democracy depends on how the regime performs: if well, the people will support it; if poorly, they will not (Clark, Dutts, and Kronberg 1993). Do these measures travel to Asia?

Concepts, Measures, Method, and Data

Foa and Mounk's deconsolidation argument and Inglehart's response use public opinion data from the World Value Survey (Foa and Mounk 2016; Inglehart 2016). Foa and Mounk focus on two mass-level indicators: support for democracy and support for authoritarianism. Support for democracy has declined and support for authoritarianism has increased. They label these trends democratic deconsolidation.

Public opinion survey data such as the World Value Survey and, in Asia, the Asian Barometer, are relevant to discuss deconsolidation because they regularly and intensively collect data about relevant attitudes. In the Asian Barometer surveys, support for democracy as an attitudinal concept has been measured with several indicators that are more complex and believed to be more accurate than the one or two indicators used by Foa and Mounk (2016). This article relies on the Asian Barometer, which has regularly collected data in Asian countries over the last 15 years.

The attitudinal measures of democratic consolidation in the Asian Barometer are about regime preference, preference for a strong leader, preference for one political party, democratic expectation, democratic suitability, problems of democracy, support for army-led government, support for expert-led

government, support for gender equality, and freedom of speech and ideas.[2] The survey method is probability sampling, which is believed to produce samples that represent national public opinion in each country.[3]

Findings

Our first indicator of democratic support is stated regime preference.[4] In general, in the four Asian democracies, a majority of citizens support democracy (i.e., "democracy is always preferable to any kind of government"). From 2000-2019 support for democracy rose while support for alternatives declined. In the 2000s the opinion that democracy is always preferable was 57%, which increased to 65% in 2019, statistically significant at $p<.001$.[5]

Among the four countries, the highest support across time was among Indonesians (75%) and the lowest among Taiwanese (49%). If we examine the tendencies in each country, we can see significant variation. In Japan, support fluctuates but in general declines from 77% in the early 2000s to 64% in 2012, and increases again to 73% in 2016, significant at $p<.001$. Taiwan is similar.

Conversely, in Korea, democratic preference strengthened over the same period. In the early 2000s, democratic preference among Koreans was 49%, a figure which increased very significantly to 65% in 2015. Indonesia is similar. The percentage of Indonesians who prefer democracy increases from 74% in 2006 to 79% in 2019, statistically significant at $p<.001$.

Democratic support can also be measured by the rejection of support for strong leaders who are not chosen by the people and who are willing to suspend

[2] Wordings, scorings, and codings of all measures will be directly presented in the findings section.
[3] Concerning method and data, see Asian Barometer at http://www.asianbarometer.org/survey/survey-methods
[4] Which of the following statements comes closest to your opinion? 1. Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government; 2. Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one; 3. For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or nondemocratic regime. In the descriptive analysis, responses of don't know, no answer, and don't understand are treated as missing values.
[5] Analysis of variance (Anova) statistics are applied in all bivariate analysis in this article.

parliament.[6] In general people in the four democracies oppose a strong leader. They disagree with the notion that leaders should dispense with parliament and elections. However, support for a strong leader varies and fluctuates over time and country. In general, the strongest rejection is from the Japanese (mean score 3.303 on a 1-4 scale), and the weakest from Indonesians, although it is worth noting that Indonesians still reject the idea of strong leader (mean score 2.964). Nonetheless, in Japan, disagreement with the idea of a strong leader tended to decrease from 3.412 in 2003 to 3.337 in 2015, and in Indonesia from 3.012 in 2006 to 2.967 in 2019. The decreases are statistically significant at $p<.001$. In Korea the pattern is relatively stable, while in Taiwan disagreement increased from 2.963 in 2001 to 3.039 in 2014, statistically significant at $p<.001$.

If support for democracy is measured by the extent to which people reject a one-party system—which does away with party contestation, a democratic precondition—in general people in the four countries support democracy.[7] This support has increased over time in the four nations, from 3.117 in the early 2000s to 3.257 in the 2015s. The highest rejection of the one-party system among the four countries is Japan (mean score 3.368), the lowest Indonesia (mean score 2.994). In addition, in Japan rejection has intensified from 3.105 in 2003 to 3.478 in 2016, while in Korea and Taiwan it has fluctuated but also tended to strengthen. In Indonesia, on the contrary, it has weakened, from 3.079 in 2006 to 2.988 in 2019. This decline is statistically significant at $p<001$.

Democratic support can also be seen in citizen perceptions as to "how suited democracy is to our country."[8] In several surveys of the four Asian democracies, citizens consistently think that democracy is suitable for their countries. There is some fluctuation, but still within the range of positive support. The highest

[6] We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things: 1) strongly agree, 2) agree, 3) disagree, 4) strongly disagree.
[7] Only one political party should be allowed to stand for election and hold office: 1) strongly agree, 2) agree, 3) disagree, 4) strongly disagree.
[8] On a 1-10 scale where 1 = completely unsuitable, and 10 = completely suitable, do you think democracy is suitable for our country?

suitability is in Indonesia (mean score 7.614 on a 1-10 scale), the lowest Taiwan (mean score 7.007). Viewed by country, the trends vary considerably. In Korea and Taiwan support has tended to strengthen, while in Indonesia it fluctuates more.

Democratic support can also be indicated by responses to the question whether democracy can resolve issues facing the country.[9] The series of surveys in the four democracies shows that in general citizens believe that democracy can resolve such issues. This confidence is highest in Indonesia (85%), lowest in Taiwan (62%), though both are within the positive range. This trend has also intensified in the last fifteen years, from 70% to 74%. The tendencies are all within the range of affirmative belief that democracy can solve problems. The most positive trends are in Taiwan and Korea, they fluctuate in Indonesia, and in Japan they have tended to decline.

In the Asian Barometer surveys, democratic support can also be seen in the extent to which citizens hope their country will continue to be a democracy in the future.[10] In the four countries surveyed, nearly all citizens want their countries to continue to be democracies. The highest are Indonesia (8.113 on a ten-point scale) and Taiwan (8.110), the lowest Japan (6.716), even though the latter is still within the positive range. Support for this view in the last fifteen years has fluctuated, but it is still within the range of respondents hoping that their country will remain a democracy. That fluctuation is visible in every country. There is a decline in Indonesia and Japan but, again, still on average in favor of maintaining a democracy. In Taiwan the hope has gotten stronger over time, while in Korea it has fluctuated or been stable.

The perception that democracy is the best form of government even though it has problems is also a good indicator of democratic support.[11] In the surveys, a

[9] Wording: Which of the following statements comes closest to your own opinion? 1. Democracy cannot solve our society's problems. 2) Democracy is capable of solving the problems of our society.
[10] On a 1-10 scale, where 1 = not democratic at all, 10 = fully democratic, where would you expect our country to be in the future?
[11] Democracy may have its own problems, but it is still the best system of government: 1) strongly agree, 2) agree, 3) disagree, 4) strongly disagree. Coding was reversed.

majority of people in the four democracies agree. This attitude was in general stable in the last ten years.[12] Per case, there is a significant difference, to be sure. In Japan and Korea, the trends were stable. In Taiwan support decreased from 2.916 to 2.613 (on a 1-4 scale), while in Indonesia it increased from 2.991 to 3.518.

Citizen rejection of military government is another indicator of democratic support, or conversely, supporting army rule indicates rejection of democracy. In the four Asian democracies a majority of citizens reject the idea of a military takeover of the state.[13] The highest rejection of military government is in Japan (3.793 on a 1-4 scale), the lowest in Indonesia (2.678), though in the latter, the population still on balance rejects a military takeover. The tendency to reject military rule in the last fifteen years in the four nations has declined from 3.504 in the early 2000s to 3.363 in the last survey in 2019. At the same time, there is significant variation. In Korea and Taiwan the tendency to reject has grown, in Indonesia it fluctuates, and in Japan it has declined from 3.872 in the early 2000s to 3.790 in 2016.

Opposition to government by experts without elections and without parliament is another indicator of democratic strength. In the four Asian democracies, in general the citizenry reject the idea of government by experts, but there is variation over time.[14] The highest rejection is seen in Japan (3.500 on a 1-4 scale) and the lowest in Indonesia (2.916). The general tendency is decline, but within the range of rejection (Table 2). That rejection has decreased in Japan from 3.569 in 2003 to 3.498 in 2016 and has fluctuated more in Korea; it has strengthened in Taiwan from 3.028 in 2001 to 3.136 in 2014, and in Indonesia from 2.894 in 2012 to 2.954 in 2019.

The view that women do not need to involve themselves in politics as much as men is also an anti-democratic view. In the four Asian democracies support for

[12] This item was introduced only in the last two surveys (2011-2019).
[13] The army should come in to govern the country: 1) strongly agree, 2) agree, 3) disagree, 4) strongly disagree.
[14] We should get rid of elections and parliaments and have experts make decisions on behalf of the people: 1) strongly agree, 2) agree, 3) disagree, 4) strongly disagree.

gender equality is a proxy for democratic support.[15] The highest support is in Japan (3.525 on a 1-4 scale) and the lowest Indonesia (2.583), though still within the range of supporting gender equality on balance. Over time, the general tendency is stability. Looked at individually, there is a tendency for gender equality to decline in Japan (from 3.580 in 2011 to 3.468 in 2016), also in Korea (from 3.351 in 2011 to 3.255 in 2015), but to slightly increase in Taiwan (from 3.220 in 2011 to 3.265 in 2015) and to be stable in Indonesia.

Education is important for democratic health, but democracy does not discriminate on the basis of differences in level of education. The democratic principle is that the right to vote is the same for people with more and less education. Most citizens in the four countries agree with this principle, although there is variation over time and across countries.[16] Support for educational equality is highest in Japan (3.237 on a 1-4 scale) and lowest in Indonesia (2.892). In Japan support for this view declines from 3.277 in 2003 to 3.125 in 2016. In Korea it fluctuates, in Taiwan it strengthens from 3.091 in 2001 to 3.130 in 2015, and in Indonesia it is relatively stable.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Democratic Support (Indicators and Index)

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Regime preference (democratic preference)	20705	.00	1.00	.6199	.48541
Reject strong leader	21194	.00	1.00	.8410	.36568
Reject only one political party	21268	.00	1.00	.8797	.32535
Democratic suitability	21195	.00	1.00	.8207	.38365
Reject army government	21406	.00	1.00	.8848	.31927

[15] Women should not be involved in politics as much as men: 1) strongly agree, 2) agree, 3) disagree, 4) strongly disagree.
[16] People with little or no education should have as much say in politics as highly-educated people: 1) strongly disagree, 2) disagree, 3) agree, 4) strongly agree.

Democratic support index	18980	.00	1.00	.8144	.20963	

Democrats also value highly freedom of speech and reject government control of citizens' opinion expression. Most members of our four Asian democracies support freedom of speech.[17] The strongest are Japanese (3.154 on a 1-4 scale), the lowest Indonesians (2.461), even though, again, Indonesia is still in the range of supporting the free expression of ideas. In Japan and Taiwan it has strengthened, in Korea it is stable, but in Indonesia it has declined from 2.504 in 2006 to 2.382 in 2019.

Overall, in our four Asian countries the twelve indicators of democratic support that are thought to measure democratic consolidation are mostly positive. Nevertheless, there is significant variation over time and place. The lowest value indicator is regime preference (democratic preference) and the highest is rejection of army rule (Table 1).[18] For all the combined indicators and waves, democratic support is highest in Japan and lowest in Taiwan (Table 2).

As a factor, time fluctuates. When we compare the first wave (2002-2004) with the fourth (2014-2019), there is a general increase in support (Figure). By country, there is variation: Japan and Indonesia show declines, though still within the range of positive support. In Korea and Taiwan, democratic support strengthens (Figure).

[17] The government should decide whether certain ideas should be allowed to be discussed in society: Strongly agree, 2) agree, 3) disagree, 4) strongly disagree.

[18] The combined score to form an index of democratic support is based on the indicators in the four cases in the same wave. Indonesia joined Asian Barometer in Wave 2 (2006), so the trend that is observed in the index created includes 2006-2019. Not all indicators are in each wave. Five appear consistently: regime preference, strong leader, single party system, democratic suitability, and army government. It is therefore only these five indicators that are analyzed further to provide a general picture of democratic support. Because the scales that are used differ for those five items, comparability is achieved by using a dummy variable (1 = democratic support, 0 = otherwise). These five items actually form two dimensions in a factor analysis, but the inter-item correlation is not negative. In order to read it more simply we constructed an additive index of the five items to construct a single index of democratic support (0-1).

Table 2. Democratic Support by Country (Anova)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Japan	4569	.8440	.20327	.00301	.8381	.8499	.00	1.00
Korea	4588	.8181	.20369	.00301	.8122	.8240	.00	1.00
Taiwan	5340	.7876	.21325	.00292	.7819	.7933	.00	1.00
Indonesia	4320	.8049	.21674	.00330	.7985	.8114	.00	1.00
Total	18817	.8127	.21040	.00153	.8097	.8157	.00	1.00
F/(df1,df2)/sig. = 62.732/(3,18813)/0.000								

The country facts show that the trend toward democratic consolidation or deconsolidation varies. They must therefore be seen case by case and we cannot offer a single general conclusion. At the same time, there is an interesting phenomenon not previously observed in the literature: democratic support in Japan and Indonesia has softened, while in Korea and Taiwan it has strengthened. Japan is the oldest consolidated democracy in Asia; it was part of Huntington's so-called second wave of democracy (Huntington 1991). Since the end of its post-World War II occupation by the US, Japan has been an uninterrupted democracy.

Indonesia is the newest democracy, from its revolutionary nationalist inception in 1945. The first democratic election was held in 1955, but the government produced by that election lasted only about four years, ending in 1959 (Feith, 1962). From then until 1998 Indonesia was governed by two authoritarian regimes, the Guided Democracy of President Sukarno and the New Order of President Suharto, for a total of nearly forty years. A democratic regime was only reestablished in 1999, barely twenty years ago.

Democratic deconsolidation thus appears to be occurring both in countries that have long been consolidated and that have only recently democratized. What Japan is experiencing is perhaps similar to American, Western European, Australian, and New Zealand experiences, as argued by Foa and Mounk (2016). What Indonesia is experiencing is perhaps similar to other new democracies that

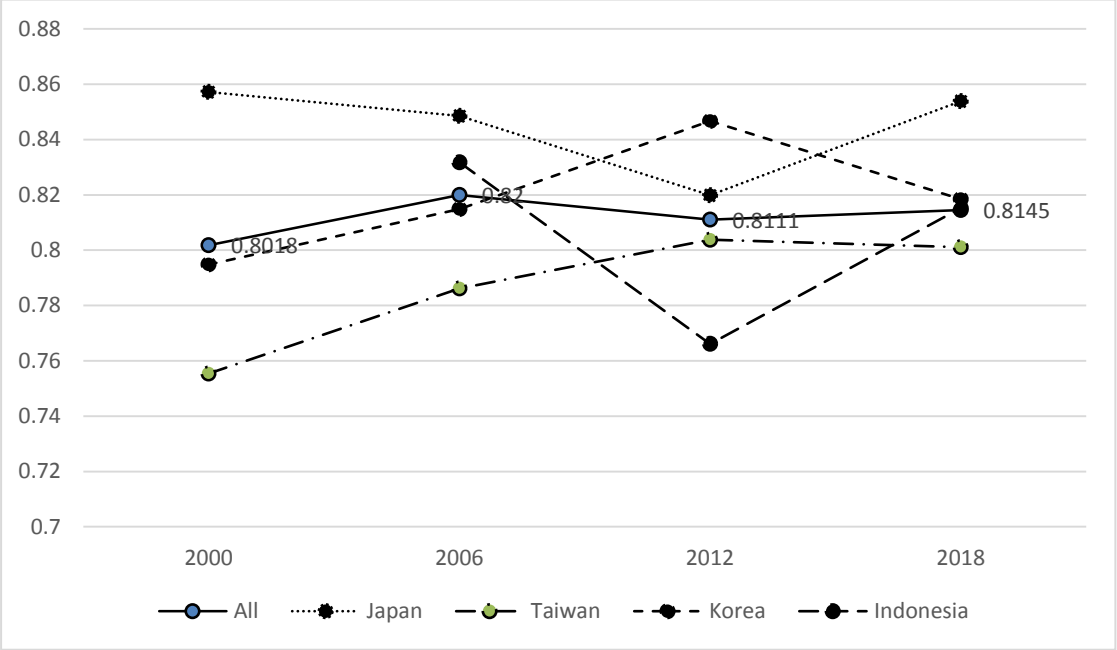
have had difficulty consolidating. In Southeast Asia, these countries include the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand, though Indonesia is the one democracy in the region that was once regarded as Fully Free or consolidated by Freedom House, from 2006-2013. At the same time, the signs of deconsolidation are not visible in Korea and Taiwan, where democratic support has tended to increase.

How to explain these variations? Do generational differences and declines in political interest explain the variation as Foa and Mounk claim? Are they more impactful relative to education and democratic peformance, which have been found by many studies to be strong predictors of democracy?

In the civic culture perspective, democracy can grow and perform well if it is supported by political engagement at the mass level, as shown by levels of political interest, voter turnout, and party identification. Some analysts have argued specifically that democratic deconsolidation is associated with the decline of these indicators of engagement and that this decline is generational. Younger generations tend to be more apathetic politically (Foa and Mounk, 2016: 10-11).

In other words, the decline in democratic support is a function of the decline in political engagement, and both of these are associated with generational change. Younger generations, and the millennial generation specifically, tend to be less engaged politically and might therefore be less supportive of democracy compared with more senior generations. From a static generational perspective, the future of democracy is threatened because members of the millennial generation who will fill the ranks of future voters are much weaker supporters of democracy.

Figure. Trend of Democratic Support by Country
(mean score on a 0-1 scale index)



Is this the case in our four Asian democracies? Do political interest and generation have an effect on democratic support after weighing other factors which in many studies have been found to strengthen it, especially democratic performance, economic condition, and several demographic factors, especially education?[19]

A multivariate analysis reveals the relative effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable, i.e., democratic support as a measure of democratic consolidation at the attitudinal level (Table 3).[20] In terms of political

[19] On the relationship between education and democracy see Lipset (1959) and Norris (2011), and between democratic performance and democratic support see Mujani and Liddle (2015).

[20] In this analysis, the dependent variable is a 0-1 index of democratic support constructed from 5 items (see Table 2). The independent variables are: 1) Millennial generation (40 years old or younger, coded 1, and other coded 0), 2) political interest (how interested would you say you are in politics? 1 = not at all interested... 4 = very interested, 3) democratic performance (on the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied

interest, its effect on democratic support in the four cases is not consistent (Table 3). The strongest influence is found in Taiwan, then in Japan, though not as strong as in Taiwan. In Indonesia, political interest does have a strong influence, but a negative one, on democratic support. The Indonesian phenomenon is also apparent in South Korea (Table 2). Thus there is no general pattern that demonstrates the positive influence of political interest on democratic support.

Intriguingly, this suggests that the conception or understanding of political interest in our several countries may not be the same. The meaning of "interested in politics" and "support democracy" in the four Asian democracies may differ to the extent that the association, and the meaning of that association, among countries also differs considerably.

Is the generational difference important? When all citizens and survey waves are combined, generation does have an influence: the millennial generation is negatively associated with support for democracy, compared to the generation prior to it (Table 3). This effect is consistent across waves and time. If examined by country, the negative effect is strongest in Japan, then Taiwan, then Indonesia. If examined by wave per country, the negative effect is seen as most consistent and strongest in Japan. This is followed by Taiwan even though it is less strong or consistent. The same is true for Indonesia.

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are you with the way democracy works in the country? 1=Not at all satisfied ... 4 = Very satisfied), 4) Economic condition (a 1-5 scale index constructed from 4 items: 1) overall economic condition of our country today, 2) the change in the economic condition of our country over the last few years, 3) the economic situation of your family today, 4) current economic condition of your family compared to it was a few years ago. Each item is a 1-5 scale (1 = very bad, 5 = very good), 5) education: level of education: 1 = never go to school ... 10 = college graduate or higher.

The four Asian democracies demonstrate that the generational effect toward democratic support varies, but is in general negative. Generation is important for most of the cases and is consistent over time, but it clearly does not apply to all cases. If compared with other factors, especially democratic performance and education, which in many other studies are very important for democratic support, the effects of political interest and generational difference are not as strong or as consisistent as democratic performance and education.

In the four Asian democracies, democratic performance increases democratic support consistently over time (Table 3). In other words, more voters will support democracy if they assess positively democratic performance in their country regardless of generation. As long as democracy performs well, both young and old will support it.

Education, which until now has been believed to be an important factor in strengthening democracy, does indeed appear to have that effect in this analysis. Indeed, the positive effect of education on democratic support is much stronger and more consistent in the four democracies compared to the effect of generational differences and even more of political engagement. Regardless of generation and political engagement, even regardless of democratic performance, education strengthens democratic support consistently (Table 3).

Democratic support or democratic consolidation in the four Asian countries is strongly and positively influenced by education. Because education levels tend to rise over time we expect that democratic support will be stronger in

the future. But generational differences also matter. Millennials only weakly support democracies, but is it true that their political attitudes will not change when they become seniors? Does political socialization end with their becoming mature citizens?

Table 3. Multivariate Analysis of Democratic Support

(Regression Coefficients and Std. Error)

	All	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Japan	Korea	Taiwan	Indonesia
Constant	.613***	.566***	.645***	.592***	.636***	.573***	.749***	.485***	.682***
	(.013)	(.032)	(.028)	(.027)	(.026)	(.029)	(.030)	(.026)	(.028)
Millenial	-.030***	-.021***	-.020**	-.033***	-.032***	-056***	-.010	-.031***	-.015*
	(.003)	(.008)	(.007)	(.006)	(.006)	(.00&)	(.007)	(.006)	(.007)
Political	.002	.015**	.014***	-.021***	.010**	.008*	-.008*	.015***	-.013***
interest	(.002)	(.004)	(.004)	(.004)	(.004)	(.004)	(.004)	(.003)	(.004)
Democratic	.039***	.040***	.040***	.046***	.025***	.053***	.018***	.043 ***	.029***
performance	(.002)	(.005)	(.005)	(.004)	(.004)	(.004)	(.005)	(.004)	(.005)
Economic	-.002	-.002	-.012*	.004	.001	.004	-.006	.000	-.009
conditions	(.002)	(.006)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.004)	(.005)
Education	.019***	.014***	.018***	.020***	.018***	.016***	.011***	.024***	.020***
	(.001)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.001)
N	18,287	3,479	4,255	5,264	5,315	4,309	4,479	5,171	4,174
R-square	.053	.067	.069	.080	.042	.077	.012	.078	.058

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Discussion and conclusion

Are democracies deconsolidating today, according to analyses based on opinion surveys? One assessment claims they are. In consolidated democracies, people's preference or support for democracy has decreased and their support for authoritarianism has increased (Foa and Mounk 2016; Croissant and Diamond 2020). A second argues that democratic support versus authoritarian preference

are always fluctuating over time and by country with no consistent trend (Inglehart 2016). Which is more realistic or better reflects the data?

In our four Asian democracies the second assessment is more realistic. Popular preference for democracy rather than authoritarianism in general has strengthened, but it does appear to fluctuate over time and over country. How can we explain this variation?

Foa and Mounk argue that the civic culture model helps explain the decline of democratic support in consolidated democracies. Specifically, they refer to political interest as a component of civic culture to predict democratic support. In their model, if political interest increases democratic preference will as well. Foa and Mounk found that political interest in consolidated democracies has decreased, and this decrease explains the decline of democratic support. In addition, they argue that generational difference explains democratic deconsolidation. The millenial generation is less likely to support democracy. Millenial rejection will therefore weaken democracies, as the millenials will continue to comprise a larger share of the population relative to their seniors.

This article has demonstrated that in the four Asian democracies there is no consistent relationship between political interest and democratic support. This component of the civic culture model does not consistently explain democratic consolidation. The generational effect is also inconsistent. The negative impact of the millenials is visible in Japan, Taiwan, and Indonesia, but not in Korea. In addition, the claim that generation matters to regime support should take into

account the extent to which attitudes toward democracy are stable over time rather than over life cycle because of the possible continuing impact of political socialization on future generations.

Political economy is an alternative model, according to which the public's assessment of a country's economic condition will affect how it evaluates regime performance, which will in turn explain regime support. If the economy is strong, then people will be satisfied with how democracy is working, which will increase their democratic support.

The four Asian democracies show that the political economic model more persuasively explains democratic support versus authoritarian preference compared to the civic culture model. A citizen who is satisfied with the way democracy has worked in his or her country very significantly supports democracy. At the same time, citizens who are not satisfied with democratic performance very significantly prefer authoritarianism.

This article has also demonstrated the significance of education in bolstering democratic support. The positive effect of education is significant and consistent across country and over time in the four democracies. The higher the level of education the higher the democratic support. This evidence confirms many previous studies, but was absent in Foa and Mount's analysis.

Because the trend toward more and higher education continues to be strong in the four countries as well, the effect on democratic support will continue to be positive. Democratic performance and education in the future will help

contain the possibility of a weakening of that support in the four democracies, and perhaps elsewhere in the world as well.

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ASSESSING UNITED STATES GRAND STRATEGY: ESTIMATING THE PATTERN OF UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY ON SOUTHEAST ASIA UNDER THE BIDEN PRESIDENCY

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Abstract

Assessing United States (U.S.) past grand strategy is a useful guide to gauge foreign policy intentions enabling us to gain vital insights to discern the broad pattern of U.S. foreign policy under various administrations. Such an approach can be of benefit to the academic and policy community giving us a sense of the priorities of the foreign policy priorities of the Biden administration particularly with respect to the security of Southeast Asia. With this aim in mind, our article employs a variation of the analytical framework employed in the field of foreign policy evaluation to examine the possible options for U.S. Grand Strategy. At the risk of oversimplification, it selects and assesses four samples of U.S. Grand Strategy alternatives: isolationism, offshore balancing, selective engagement, and deep engagement. Next we focus on recent events to assess which pattern of Grand Strategy best describes the Biden administration's foreign policy stance. Our aim is that these insights will help regional actors to anticipate and respond accordingly to the Biden administration's foreign policy stance.

Introduction

The U.S. has faced significant challenges in recent years yet it still remains the preeminent country in the world. No other power comes close to matching its dominance in economic, military, diplomatic, financial, technological and cultural realms. Without a doubt, the options adopted by President Biden as he charts a new foreign course for his country will resonate with the rest of the world especially the Asian region.

While putting its domestic house in order by trying to reign in partisan divides nurtured by his predecessor Donald Trump and his poor handling of the

COVID-19 pandemic, President Biden is addressing his country's fight against the pandemic and thereby keeping its economic recovery on course. As a safeguard, a USD1.9 trillion stimulus is now in place to sustain the recovery.

More importantly, and for the purposes of this article, the U.S. has re-engaged international affairs after four years of his predecessor's America First strategy. The U.S. is back in the World Health Organization (WHO), re-entered the Paris climate accords and aims to cooperate in the strengthening of the World Trade Organization. Critically, the Biden Administration wants to ratchet up the pressure on its rivals China and Russia. There is a greater emphasis on improved ties with Asia and Europe with talk of a reinvigorated western alliance and a desire to give higher priority to Asian policy. We do not expect that the foreign policy road ahead to be smooth sailing. This is really the honeymoon phase for the Biden administration. In the foreign policy arena, some element of coordination between China and Russia will keep the U.S. off balance. Tests of the administration's resolve will almost certainly come from Iran and North Korea as these countries destabilize the strategic equation in their respective regions. With that context as the backdrop, how will Biden administration's grand strategy evolve and what will be the implications for Southeast Asia? Answering this question will be the objective of this article.

Understanding Grand Strategy

The grand strategy is one of those timeless concepts regularly examined within the International Relations (IR) literature dating back from the pre-Cold War era.[1]

[1] The history of the concept is perhaps at best murky. The concept appeared to gain prominence within the history and political science literature since the Second World War. See Edward Mead Earle, "Introduction," in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Edward Mead Earle (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1943); Bernard Brodie, "Strategy as a Science," *World Politics* 1, no. 4 (1949). For a more recent contribution, see John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York: Penguin, 2018); Richard K. Betts, "The Grandiosity of Grand Strategy," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (2019); David Gethin Morgan-Owen, "History and the Perils of Grand Strategy," *The Journal of Modern History* 92, no. 2 (2020); Thierry Balzacq and Ronald R. Krebs, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

As an approach used to achieve long-term objectives, the grand strategy represents the highest level of planning on how any sitting government intends to secure its nation using various foreign policy tools in its arsenal. In addition, the policy and academic discussions on grand strategy predominantly revolve around the experience of great power, notably the U.S.[2] Moreover, assessing the grand strategy produces important insights that are useful to learn and to estimate the pattern of a particular country's goals, means, and commitments that shape its overall foreign policy.

Momentum to continue the discussion on U.S. grand strategy has arguably been reignited with the inauguration of Joseph Biden as the U.S. 46th President. In the run-up to the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, Joe Biden as the Democratic Party's leading nominee for presidential candidate outlined his campaign promises that relate to America's foreign policy and its role in international politics (Biden Jr, 2020). However, President Biden is now facing a more tenuous situation – both home and abroad – compared to when President Donald Trump came in four years ago. Around the globe, perceptions are strong that the U.S. is declining as a global influence with imminent challenges from both competitors and adversaries, and a society at home that is deeply polarized.

Within weeks into his administration, President Biden enacted an Interim National Security Strategic Guidance as the major policy guideline to address pressing challenges (Biden Jr, 2021). Whether the Interim National Security document becomes another metaphorical "Christmas Tree" of U.S. foreign policy, or a meaningful guideline depends on how President Biden engages the world over the course of the second half of 2021. At the very least, the guideline will serve to consolidate the Biden administration's authority over foreign policy, reorient the domestic support, and assure the reversal of Trump's unsettling

[2] To quote a few, prominent sample includes George Keenan's famous long telegram to Hal Brand's assessment on Trump's grand strategy. See George F. Keenan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (1947); Hal Brands, *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2018).

legacy (Spetalnik et al, 2021) (Golby & Feaver, 2021). More importantly, the guideline translates President Biden's campaign promises into a coherent plan to reaffirm U.S. commitments to global initiatives and reclaim America's role as a "responsible" global leader.

Against this backdrop, this article asks the following questions: Based on the pattern of U.S. grand strategy alternatives, how will the Biden administration's foreign policy engage Southeast Asia? To answer this question, this article proceeds with the aim of addressing two tasks. It first analyses a possible set of U.S. grand strategy alternatives using an analytical framework outlined in the subsequent section. Second, it provides a preliminary assessment on whether President Biden's campaign vision and his actual foreign policy within the first few months fit into any discernible patterns as postulated in these grand strategy alternatives. The article though recognizes two limitations. First, the assessment of U.S. grand strategy alternatives runs the risk of oversimplification.[3] Second, the article acknowledges limitations in our analysis as this can only be a preliminary assessment on the ground that the Biden administration has only been in office since January 2021.

This article proceeds in the following manner. First, it starts by outlining the analytical framework by assessing different grand strategy alternatives. Following such a framework, the article then examines four samples of U.S. Grand Strategy alternatives: (neo) isolationism, offshore balancing, selective engagement, and deep engagement. Then, it puts forward a preliminary assessment of the Biden administration's foreign policy as observed from its first five months in office. The article concludes with reflection points targeted for both U.S. foreign policy observers and Southeast Asian policymakers.

[3] The risk of oversimplification is within reasonable limit, considering that a grand strategy might represent the actual day-to-day strategic interaction. For another article acknowledging such risk see Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Finite Containment: Analyzing U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 14, no. 1 (1989): 6.

Analytical Framework: Key Variables in Assessing Grand Strategy Alternatives.

Assessing grand strategy has become a regular exercise within the fields of Political Science, IR, and even History – particularly among U.S academia – which resulted in the need for us to delve into various existing analytical frameworks.[4] This article contends that grand strategy can also be framed as a form of foreign policy output – albeit on a larger scale – and therefore can be assessed as a framework for policy evaluation.[5] Despite the differences, this article finds common criteria shared by the perspectives of Walt and Mearsheimer and those of Baldwin. These criteria include (1) limited or expanded definition of *national objectives* and *vital interest*, (2) the prescription that limits or allows the *means* and *cost* of conducting foreign policy to achieve such vital interest, and lastly (3) the *stake* or *willingness* in conducting such policy and accepting the costs that it entail.

Definition of National Objectives and Vital Interest. A grand strategy – like any other policy – is oriented towards achieving *national objectives* which more likely includes the plan to secure *vital interest*. Hence, the first point to assess concerns whether a grand strategy identifies and states the scope of these vital interests. Three propositions are used in assessing the scope of objectives and vital interest: whether the grand strategy defines limited or expanded vital interest; whether the strategy intends to stimulate short term or long term change over its policy targets; and whether the strategy risks negative or positive impacts regarding its overall objective and vital interest.[6]

[4] Prominent contemporary thinkers on American Grand Strategy include Hal Brands, Richard K. Betts, Anne Marie Slaughter, Robert Art, Stephen Walt, John Mearsheimer, and others. See Brands, *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump*; Betts, "The Grandiosity of Grand Strategy."; Anne-Marie Slaughter, *The Chessboard and the Web: Strategies of Connection in a Networked World* (New Haven, C.N.: Yale University Press, 2017); Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 4 (2016).

[5] An example of tools for evaluating foreign policy, see David A. Baldwin, "Success and Failure in Foreign Policy," *Annual Review of Political Science* 3 (2000).

[6] This point is inspired from David Baldwin's article which acknowledges Robert Dahl's argument that

The Scope of Means and Cost. The second point of assessment involves the means and cost that are likely to be incurred with the grand strategy alternatives. Any policy calculation needs to be accompanied by a balanced cost rationale: whether the cost is feasible for the user and whether such costs could generate the overall net achievement.[7] In addition, the cost calculation on grand strategy alternatives should also consider the likely strategic interaction between the user and its adversary or competitors as a policy target. Any grand strategy that could increase the likely cost imposed to the adversary or competitor – valued in both material and nonmaterial cost – is considered effective.[8]

The Stake and Willingness. The last point of assessment involves the stakes and willingness of both the policy user and the policy target. Assessing the stakes and willingness involves estimating the level of domestic public support towards the given grand strategy: whether its definition on objectives and vital interest are palatable for domestic public support. It is more likely that the domestic support for a particular foreign policy has a negative correlation value with the foreign policy commitment. Meaning that every time the government expands foreign policy commitment – which in most cases involves military deployments – domestic public support usually dwindles. In addition, like the second criteria, assessing the stakes and willingness over its policy target requires understanding the likely strategic interactions. Some type of grand strategy might induce the target country to harden its domestic resolve.

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policy may also produce a negative effect in terms of goal attainment. See Baldwin, "Success and Failure in Foreign Policy."; Robert A. Dahl, "The Concept of Power," *Behavioral Science* 2 (1957).

[7] This point is also taken from Baldwin which quoted Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblom in arguing that any policy should be rationally designed to maximize the net goal achievement to the extend it is also efficient. See *Politics, Economics, and Welfare: Planning and Politico-Economic Systems Resolved into Basic Social Processes* (Chicago, I.L.: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 38-9.

[8] Again, foreign policy evaluation advises to look at the likely cost imposed to the target in the overall calculation of cost-effectiveness. See "Success and Failure in Foreign Policy," 175; Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 197; Thomas C. Schelling, *Choice and Consequence: Perspectives of an Errant Economist* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 274; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *The War Trap* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 1981), 90..

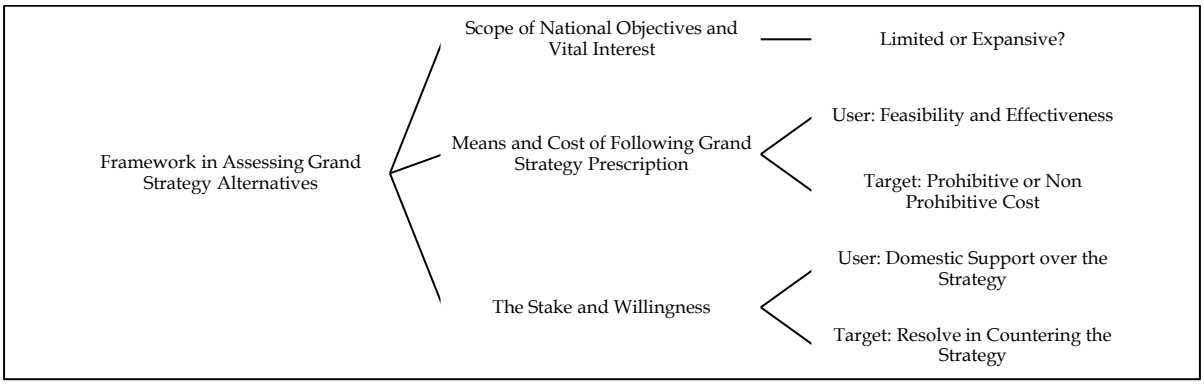

Figure 1. Framework in Assessing Grand Strategy.
Source: Author's design.

All in all, these three points are best summarized in the figure above. The article now proceeds in assessing the U.S. grand strategy alternatives in the following section.

U.S. Grand Strategy Alternatives: Neo-Isolationism to Global Engagement

This section analyses the four U.S. grand strategy alternatives. As previously mentioned, the four U.S. grand strategy alternatives to be assessed are: neo-isolationism, offshore balancing, selective engagement, and deep engagement. We have opted for these four alternatives based on two reasons.[9] First, these grand strategy alternatives have emerged on various occasions as a potential replacement for the U.S. containment grand strategy (or strategies, if you will) during the Cold War. Second, these alternatives – and their advocates – adequately address U.S. vital interest and elaborate the means to achieve such interest according to each theoretical and empirical underpinning. The article then proceeds with a brief description of the main tenets of these grand strategy alternatives.

[9] In a 1996 *International Security* article, Barry Posen and Andrew Ross have discussed three of these alternatives: Neo-Isolationism, Selective Engagement, and Primacy (or Deep Engagement). For a detailed discussion, see Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (1996): 6. The idea of offshore balancing was coined relatively at the same time but has seen more vigour recently. See Mearsheimer and Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy."

Neo-isolationism. The main assumption of the (neo)-isolationism (or disengagement if you will) revolves around the belief that the U.S. has little security interest beyond its borders.[10] The advocates of neo-isolationism define American vital interest as "the security, liberty, and property of American people" (Bandow, 1994: 10) and believe that threats to those vital interest are at best modest. As a result, advocates of neo-isolationism tend to deem any form of U.S. overseas commitment counterproductive and unnecessary. In a recent discussion, authors have contended whether the Trump administration's "America First" doctrine has some roots in this isolationism tradition in U.S. foreign policy (Posen, 2018) (Kupchan, 2010). Nevertheless, isolationism and its newer forms have reserved their place as one of the U.S. grand strategy alternatives.

Offshore Balancing. The second grand strategy alternative is in recent times one of the most popular alternatives among U.S. academics. Its proponents – John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt – argue that offshore balancing may become a superior grand strategy alternative because it could set reasonable limits on U.S. foreign policy goals as well as the means to achieve it. Pertaining to U.S. vital interest, Mearsheimer and Walt (2016) argue that it needs to include other regions that are crucial for the U.S. economy – particularly those which are industrialized like Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Middle East. In addition, it differs from the "selective engagement" approach – which advocates U.S. military presence in those three regions. The advocates of offshore balancing argue that the U.S. would only need to deploy its military forces in cases where its allies are unable to balance against the regional hegemon.

Selective Engagement. Theoretically, selective engagement is situated – based on the level of U.S. foreign policy commitment alone – at a midway point between the grand strategy of isolationism and deep engagement. Its proponent,

[10] Walt, "The Case for Finite Containment: Analyzing U.S. Grand Strategy," 7. Walt summarizes the traits of Neo-Isolationism by listing down its advocates which among others includes Earl Ravenal, *NATO: The Tides of Discontent* (Berkeley, C.A.: Institute of International Studies, 1985); Laurence Radway, "Let Europe Be Europe," *World Policy Journal* 1, no. 1 (1983); Eric A. Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured: American Foreign Policy for a New Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

Robert J. Art, starts from the assumption that an alternative grand strategy must be able to set limits on U.S. foreign policy objectives (Art, 2003). Like offshore balancing, Art defines U.S. interests in broader terms than advocates of isolationism grand strategy, yet Art's approach is more limited than deep engagement which he calls a strategy of dominion. However, unlike Mearsheimer and Walt, Art believes that the U.S would require to have a forward deployment stance in Eurasia and the Middle East to secure those vital interests. As a consequence, prescribing selective engagement may cost the U.S. more in terms of sustaining the need for a military presence in those areas. In defending this particular policy choice, Art argues that having a forward-deployed military is cheaper rather than hastily deploying one in an emergency situation. In addition, a U.S. military presence in those regions also would deter likely adversaries and competitors.

Deep Engagement. Deep engagement (or *Primacy* and *Dominion*) perhaps is an alternative that brings with it an avalanche of criticism due to its highly ambitious nature.[11] Administrations that adhere to this grand strategy tend to define American national interest in the broadest terms – to maintain U.S. supremacy – and oftentimes seek to define the world in its image. To achieve such goals, the advocates of deep engagement or primacy tend to prescribe a wide array of policies designed to outdistance any global competitors militarily, economically, and politically.[12] In addition, due to its prohibitive cost, adopting such a grand strategy option is hard to defend in the face of the domestic public accountability. Such a grand strategy may also invite a reaction from U.S. adversaries or competitors risking blowback, and with it, greater risks.

[11] The proponents of the above-mentioned grand strategy alternatives point out each and their own criticism towards this approach, with most calling it unfeasible due to its extremely costly nature which may lead to – as historian Paul Kennedy termed – imperial overstretch. See Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Random House, 1987).

[12] Posen and Ross describe the advocates of primacy tend to believe that U.S. would need to preclude any rising competitors and challengers. See Posen and Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," 32-3.

Table 1. Comparison on U.S. Grand Strategy Alternatives.

Grand Strategy	Objective and Interest	Means and Cost		Stakes and Commitment		Impact on East Asia
		Policy Users	Policy Targets	Policy Users	Policy Targets	
Neo-Isolationism	**At minimum:** Designed only to protect mainland U.S. and promote economic prosperity	At a very low cost. Perhaps very costly for U.S. allies.	Almost certain to put small to no cost at all to U.S. adversary and competitors.	No overseas commitment. Allows domestic nation-building. Avert entrapment.	Irrelevant	Likely lead to U.S. retrenchment which would destabilize the balance of power.
Offshore Balancing	**Slightly restrictive:** Slight commitment over regions of U.S. Vital Interest (Europe, N.E. Asia, and the Middle East).	Slightly moderate cost for the U.S. and can be quite costly for its allies.	Likely to put the moderate cost for U.S. adversary and competitors.	Meagre commitment. Align with domestic opinion. Slightly avert entrapment.	Likely to be cautious on dealing with vital U.S. Interest. (regional hegemon)	Likely to maintain the regional balance of power.
Selective Engagement	**Slightly expansive:** Expanded commitment (with the military forward deployment) over regions of U.S. Vital Interest (Europe,	High cost, yet manageable for the U.S. Can divert some cost toward	Likely to put a slightly prohibitive cost on U.S. adversary and competitors.	Moderate commitment. Manageable to defend domestically. Might ensure allies commitment.	Likely to be very cautious. Slightly risky in enhancing adversary and competitor's determination.	Likely to maintain the regional balance of power.

	N.E. Asia, and the Middle East).	s U.S. allies.			(regional hegemon)	
Deep Engagement	**Very Expansive:** Active promotion of western. Democracy through extensive military and multilateral diplomatic commitment.	Very costly compared to other strategies. Low cost for U.S. allies.	More likely to put a very prohibitive cost on U.S. adversary and competitors.	Extensive commitment. Hard to defend for the domestic public. Contain risk of allies' entrapment and free riding.	Risk in enhancing adversary and competitor's determination to challenge the U.S. (Terrorist, rogue state, etc.)	Likely to invite adversary or competitor that may disrupt the balance of power.

Source: Authors' design based on the article's framework.

To provide a comparison, these four grand strategies are summarized through the above table based on the criteria outlined in the earlier section. Based on the information provided above, this article now embarks on estimating the Biden administration's foreign policy and assesses where it fits into the pattern of these alternatives.

The Promise of President Biden's Grand Strategy?

The inauguration of President Biden provided an opportunity for his policy team to undertake a fresh assessment of foreign policy and how it would look like as planners sought to distance the administration from the Trump era. To analyses the case of Biden's foreign policy, this section proceeds in the following manner. First, it would assess whether Biden's campaign promises and the issued policy document present: (1) a distinguishable list of priorities that would serve as U.S. vital interest; (2) a cost rationale on the means of achieving the vital interest; and (3) a pattern of foreign policy commitment that depends on U.S. domestic public

support. Second, this section assesses whether Biden's actual foreign policies align with his rhetoric on issues about (1) global competitors and adversaries, as well as (2) the Southeast Asia region.

Upon its inauguration, the Biden-Harris administration faced three imminent challenges on the foreign policy front: it suffered from declining influence across the globe, an imminent challenge from a rising China, and deeply polarized domestic politics. Within days into his administration, President Biden has come up with an Interim National Security Strategic Guidance that represented his political commitment to return the U.S. position as a trusted global leader and to repair its commitment towards its allies. According to the document, the Biden administration defines U.S. national interest by outlining the following priorities: "(1) …*to protect the security of the American people*. (2) … *interest in expanding economic prosperity and opportunity*. (3) … *realizing and defending the democratic values at the heart of the American way of life*." (Biden Jr, 2021). Following such delimitations on what constitutes vital interests, the document also stated a set of means, the priority in using foreign policy tools, and the level of commitment to each key issue. Overall, the document speaks about the Biden administration's intention and willingness to go down the pattern of a *deep engagement* grand strategy, though in a more considered manner.

Hence there is an element of ambiguity over policy direction. This begs the question, what exactly is Biden's actual foreign policy? Soon after enacting the Interim National Security Strategy, the Biden administration started to take on global competitors – both China and Russia alike. On 18-19 March 2021, in its first foray, the administration engaged in official talks with China in Anchorage, Alaska. On the American side, the meeting was attended by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan; while the Chinese side was represented by Member of the Politburo and the highest-ranking foreign policy official, Yang Jiechi and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. The talk, which discussed sensitive topics including the repression of the Uyghur community in

Xinjiang and Taiwan's security, led to an exchange of "angry words" rather than a productive discussion conducive for global stability (BBC News, "US and China Trade Angry Words at High-Level Alaska Talks", 2021). Regarding U.S.-Russia relations, President Biden decided to impose sanctions for its alleged involvement in a cyberattack on Solar Winds's networks. Russian authorities though have denied all allegations of their involvement with the cyberattack (BBC News, "US imposes sanctions on Russia over cyber-attacks", 2021).

Those two episodes illustrate that the Biden administration will not hold back from using more coercive instruments when addressing the challenge posed by its global competitors. Yet the pattern of U.S. foreign policy commitment remains inconclusive without including other region and here analyzing foreign policy actions in the Middle East, South Asia, and other regions. For example, the Biden administration maintains a strong U.S. commitment in the security of Israel's security as evidenced in the recent conflict there at the cost of displaying a U.S. inability to act decisively as a "good referee" in the conflict between Israel and Hamas (Bremmer, 2021). In addition, President Biden had also signaled his plans to end the American military deployment in Afghanistan, a decision that has divided Capitol Hill (The New York Times, "Lawmakers Divided Over Biden's Plan to Withdraw All Troops from Afghanistan by Sept. 11", 2021).

If these two cases connect well with America's interest, how about the issues in a region with lesser impact on American vital interests? Consider Southeast Asia: the "hypothetical" ground zero for U.S.-China rivalry. Despite increasing Chinese maritime activity in the South China Sea and a military coup in Myanmar, the Biden administration response and attention towards Southeast Asian affairs has been muted. With regard to the human rights agenda, the Biden administration only placed economic sanctions on the Tatmadaw junta leaders who had perpetrated the coup in Myanmar (The New York Times, "Biden Imposes Sanctions on Generals Who Engineered Myanmar Coup", 2021). In addition, the Biden administration seemed to be absent in the first formal

diplomatic talks with ASEAN ministers (Lynch, Detsch, & Gramer, 2021). Perhaps President Biden indication that he is ready to engage with Southeast Asian leaders in the latter half of this year portends better outcomes for the region.

In sum, it is fair to say that the Biden administration's actual foreign policy probably fits into the larger pattern of the *selective engagement* grand strategy. With U.S. energies and attention focused on taming its global competitors, regions like Southeast Asia perhaps only serves as a sideshow in American foreign policy. President Biden's actual foreign policy – in reality merely the use of *deep engagement* rhetoric – remains poor in its demonstration effect giving the impression that Southeast Asia policy is a continuation of Trump era policy and by that extension the region remains one characterized by lower commitment similar to areas of lesser value for U.S. vital interests.

Conclusion: Anticipating the implication of Biden's Grand Strategy on Southeast Asia

This article has compared and analysed the four U.S. grand strategy alternatives in the post-Cold War setting. It also has analysed President Biden's foreign policy promises and practice in the early days of the administration. Out of the four alternatives, Biden's campaign promises demonstrate that he would go down on the path of a deep engagement grand strategy, albeit in a more considered manner. However, preliminary assessment of actual foreign policy paints a different picture highlighting that Biden's commitment was lesser than what he intended: President Biden would appear to walk the path of selective engagement, with less attention to regions that do not fall into the realm of vital interests.

For Southeast Asian countries, this pattern could have two interpretations. First, because the Biden administration would seem to focus on taming global competitors, Southeast Asian countries would not need to worry about regional stability and could retain their strategic space. Due to changes in tone and tenor of U.S.-China engagement – as compared to the Trump presidency – it could be

safe to presume that the Biden administration will engage China more cautiously and any ripple effects will not overtly change the strategic dynamic. Second, precisely because the U.S. has maintained its focus on taming global competitors, Southeast Asian countries can focus on finding new avenues for cooperation without the need to worry about external interference. Overall, Southeast Asian countries should be able to anticipate the Biden administration's likely pattern of engagement and benefit well from such a situation.

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IMAGINING SWEETER AUSTRALIA-INDONESIA RELATIONS

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Abstract

Australia's relationship with Indonesia has been a bit like the board game "Snakes and Ladders". Incremental progress in the relationship (up the ladder) is easily undone (down the snake) over a range of misunderstandings including issues like beef, boats, spies, clemency, Timor and Papua. Both countries have considerable overlapping interests. They both have to find a way to deepen and broaden the bilateral relationship to prevent this cycle from continuing to recur. In considering how to do that, understanding how they got here is important. Bilateral and multilateral engagement, on trade, education, and security including through IA-CEPA, links like the Ikahan network, additional New Colombo Plan engagement and a MANIS regional maritime cooperation forum may help make that happen.

Introduction

Geographically, Australia and Indonesia have always been, and always will be, neighbors, at the maritime fulcrum of the Indo-Pacific. Yet that does not automatically guarantee that they will be close friends or that they will understand each other well and support each other. That takes deliberate policy choices. Like siblings, these two nations have learnt to get along. Yet there is so much more potential in the relationship than has been realized so far. There have been some bitter moments and some sweet ones. To understand how we may make progress, to make sweet the bilateral ties, a historical review of where the relationship has been so far may be helpful. This paper, surveys bilateral relations from 1945 to today and considers some of the ups and downs along the way. It then outlines some suggestions for how to deepen ties and bolster regional stability to aid in furthering mutual prosperity.

Early Days

Australia committed forces for the defence of what is now Indonesia at the height of the Second World War, deploying troops to Ambon, Timor and Java in 1941 and 1942. Later, as the tide of war turned, they led the way in operations in Borneo, including the Battle of Balikpapan in 1945 (Long, 1973). After the war, Australia gave de-facto recognition of Indonesian Independence when it raised the matter of Indonesia's decolonization in the United Nations in July 1947 (DFAT, 1949). In an act of solidarity with Indonesian independence fighters, Australian port workers in Darwin and other port cities launched industrial action against Dutch ships from 1945 to 1949. This came to be known as the "Black Armada" (Dalziel, 2020).

In August 1947, a small Australian contingent deployed as military observers a part of the United Nations' Good Offices Commission, remaining until Aril 1951 (Australian War Memorial, 1951). Thereafter, recognizing the importance of the future relationship, Australia was amongst the first countries to recognize formally Indonesian independence in 1949 (DFAT, 1949).

As President Sukarno sought to consolidate power in the young democracy, his flirtation with the Communist Party of Indonesia in the early to mid-1960s caused concern, as did his rejection of Malaysian independence and his launch of *Konfrontasi*. Australia sided with Malaysia and Great Britain in defence against Indonesian incursions, but managed to keep diplomatic relations relatively stable regardless. The overthrow of Sukarno, and the establishment of the New Order under President Suharto led to the end of *Konfrontasi* and a new opening up of Indonesia. Reflecting this new approach, Indonesia was instrumental in the establishment of ASEAN in 1967 – an organization which Australia has consistently supported. Reflecting this commitment, Australia became ASEAN's first Dialogue Partner, a few years later in 1974 (DFAT, 2020). More recently, a Prime Ministerial ASEAN-Australia Summit sought to

demonstrate enduring Australian commitment to the region and its representative body.

Australia, meanwhile maintained its close security ties with Singapore and Malaysia, notably through the Five Power Defence Arrangement established in 1971. The FPDA, including the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore, helped reassure Malaysia and Singapore against the possible return of *Konfrontasi*-like policies form Indonesia. In hindsight, such concerns now seem unnecessary, yet the organization has provided a unique and broadly welcome platform for collaboration between the five participating nations. No wonder then that fifty years later the FPDA is not loved in Indonesia, although Indonesia now has observer status on FPDA activities.

Deepening Ties

Meanwhile Indonesia had been a participating member of the Colombo Plan since 1953. This intergovernmental program was launched in 1951 to strengthen relationships within Asia and the Pacific and promote partnerships for social and economic development of member nations. The program extended to cover 25 nations including Indonesia and focused on training and education, health, provision of food supplies and supply of equipment and loans. By the early 1980s thousands of Indonesian students had studied in Australia through this program (National Archives of Australia, 2021).

It would not be until early in the next century before a reciprocal program known as the "New Colombo Plan" was established in 2014 to ensure a complementary program enabled more Australians to study in Asia, notably in Indonesia. This program is designed to encourage a two-way flow of students between Australia and its neighbors (DFAT, 2019). While challenging to maintain under pandemic conditions, so far it has helped thousands of young Australians gain a greater appreciation for and understanding of Indonesia. Then

there are institutions like the Australia-Indonesia Youth Association intended to deepen mutual understanding and trust (AIYA, 2021).

Papua and East Timor Rub Points

Meanwhile, as Indonesia sought to consolidate its governance and end Dutch colonial rule, for a while in the early to mid-1960s, Australia and Indonesia disagreed over the way forward with what became Irian Jaya or West Papua. Eventually, however, following the "Act of Free Choice" in 1969, the United Nations recognized Indonesian sovereignty over the western half of the island of Papua and New Guinea. Although the vote has been criticized, ever since then Australia has supported Indonesia's position, although at times Australia has pressed Indonesia to exercise restraint in the application of violent force as it governs the territory. The concern remains that mistreatment of local Papuans can generate political backlash amongst supporters of West Papuan independence. The Australia Government has repeatedly stressed its recognition of Indonesian sovereignty and its complete disinterest in becoming involved in the security challenges there, which it sees as domestic driven and only to be solved by domestic elements of Indonesian society acting with justice and equity. Part of the reason for some residual concern over Australia's position relates to the different perspectives over East Timor.

Following Portugal's internal political revolution and its effective abandonment of its colonies in 1975, a political group considered to have links with Communist China took control of East Timor. Both the Suharto government in Jakarta and the Whitlam Government in Canberra were concerned. In sum, the concern was over a possible enclave emerging between these two countries that would resemble communist-controlled Cuba. Remember, this was shortly after the fall of South Vietnam to Communist North Vietnam. The Domino Theory may have been old by then, but it had not yet lost its political potency (Silverman, 1975).

Following a meeting in Townsville in April 1975 between Suharto and Whitlam, Australia lent support to Indonesia's intentions to take over East Timor – a move that would lead to its incorporation as a province of Indonesia (DFAT, 2000). Little did most people realize the heavy handed manner of Indonesia's occupation of East Timor – a move that saw several Australian journalists evidently deliberately killed. They became known as the "Balibo Five". Their brutal killings left Australians, notably including influential Australia's journalists, incensed (Shackleton, 2010). This event and the related fallout had a lasting corrosive effect on the bilateral relationship, with many Australians skeptical of Indonesia as a regional partner.

The Indonesian military campaign to control East Timor and remove the threat from separatists linked with the armed group that came to be known as Fretilin lasted for nearly a quarter of a century, from 1975 to 1999. Along the way, former Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas described East Timor as the 'pebble in the shoe'. This metaphor captured the enduring irritant nature of disagreements over Indonesia's handling of the East Timor question (Alatas, 2016). This was exacerbated by an incident in 1991 at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, which, according to some reports, saw as many as 200 people killed (Human Rights Watch, 1991). While the numbers are disputed, this damaged Indonesia's reputation, particularly in international settings such as the United Nations. Australia maintained its official line of support for Indonesia but privately expressed its deep concern. Unlike West Papua, the territorial incorporation of which had received full UN endorsement, East Timor remained an Indonesian administered territory without UN blessing.

Eager to bolster ties between the two countries despite these concerns, Australia's Prime Minister Paul Keating and Indonesian President Suharto agreed to the signing in December 1995 of the Australian-Indonesian Security Agreement. Arranged in secret, the agreement marked a departure from Indonesia's policy of avoiding formal alliances. From Australia's viewpoint,

however, it seemed to represent the completion of a set of formal ties with neighbors, matching arrangements already in place with Papua New Guinea, Malaysia and Singapore, as well as New Zealand (Brown, 1995). The East Timor "pebble" seemed to be an issue that would remain within a manageable range and not expected to derail the deepening bilateral ties. That was until the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-98 up-ended domestic Indonesian politics.

As the financial crisis struck Southeast Asia, Australia became involved in conducting "Operation Ples Drai", a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operation to provide drought relief to people suffering extreme conditions in Papua New Guinea and in the neighboring Indonesian territory then known as West Irian (Papua). Australia deployed 90 military personnel from September 1997 to May 1998 and provided aid to over 90,000 Indonesians in West Irian (Blaxland, 2014). This was accompanied by "Operation AusIndo Jaya" for famine relief across Irian Jaya involving Australian military transport, engineering and health support (Bullard, 2017).

"Ples Drai" and "AusIndo jaya" were not the first time Australian military personnel had deployed to the Indonesian territory of West Irian. From 1976 to 1981, Operation "Cendarawasih" (Bird of Paradise) involved survey and mapping of parts of Indonesia, including what was then known as Irian Jaya. This had involved Australian Army survey teams and Royal Australian Air Force Huey helicopters working with the Indonesian military. This operation, and others like it in other neighboring countries, provided accurate, up-to-date mapping and an excellent opportunity to demonstrate Australian goodwill (Blaxland, 2014: 43).

Howard's and Habibie's Choices on East Timor

The turmoil in Jakarta following the onset of the Asian Financial Crisis saw Suharto lose office and replaced by his deputy, B.J. Habibie. In mid-November 1998, Australia's Prime Minister, John Howard, wrote to Habibie about the situation in East Timor. Howard wrote mindful of France's experience in outlining a ten-year transition plan towards self-determination for the people of New Caledonia that led to the signing of the so-called Matignon Agreement in June 1988 (Maclellan, 1999: 245). Evidently the comparison with a European colonial power contributed to Habibie' response which was to reject Howard's suggestion of allowing some degree of autonomy for the East Timorese people. Habibie decided instead to propose a plebiscite for the people of East Timor to vote directly for or against integration – with the 'no' vote implying a wish for independence.

The result was a ballot supervised by an unarmed United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor (UNAMET). Indonesia guaranteed security for the UNAMET staff, but the militias that formed went on a rampage after they announced the ballot result in early September. The international reaction was severe and swift. With threats of economic sanctions, Indonesia agreed to an Australian-led international intervention force to replace the Indonesian military and supervise the transition to independence (Blaxland, 2014).

Once the international force started to deploy to East Timor on 20 September 1999, the situation could have been much worse than it turned out to be. Thankfully, the day before, the Australia Army Attaché, Colonel Ken Brownrigg, convinced the Australian force commander, Major General Peter Cosgrove, to meet with the Indonesian martial law commander, Major General Kiki Syahnakri. This was made possible because all parties appreciated the importance of not allowing the situation to spiral further than they already had. Both sides understood that this was a significant downturn in the relationship, but to avoid it getting worse required close cooperation. Syahnakri agreed to facilitate

the entry into Dili of the international force which, in the first few days primarily consisted of Australian troops. Within a short while, contingents from another 21 nations added to the legitimacy of the intervention, including the deputy force commander from Thailand and contingents from several ASEAN nations including the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore.

After the Indonesian military withdrawal from East Timor in early October 1999, there were incidents on the border between Indonesian West Timor and East Timor. Escalation was avoided thanks to the deft handling of some Indonesian-speaking Australians and some cool headed counterparts in the Indonesian military (Blaxland, 2014: 143).

Aid, Terrorism and Tsunami

This low point in the bilateral relationship was followed in 2002 by the Bali bombing – a terrible incident that saw 202 people killed including 38 Indonesians and 88 Australians. Australia reached out a hand of friendship to assist in tracking down the perpetrators. With forensic and intelligence experts providing assistance, the Indonesian authorities were able to apprehend those involved in the bombing. Other incidents happened in Jakarta and again in Bali. In each case, Australian and Indonesian authorities worked closely, realizing they had more in common than most realized. Slowly but surely the bilateral relationship returned to balance. Cooperation reached its highest point up to that stage in 2004 with the establishment of the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation or JCLEC in Semarang as a joint venture (Detik News, 2010).

Then, on 26 December 2004, an earthquake in the Indian Ocean generated a tsunami, which struck the coast of Aceh. Prior to this point, it had appeared inconceivable that Australian military forces would ever deploy there. The crisis was on an unimaginable scale and Australia offered to help. Indonesia then accepted the offer of medical, engineering and transport assistance. Australia launched "Operation Sumatra Assist" (Bullard, 2017: 292). The deployment of

Australian naval amphibious ships, carrying engineering and medical stores, as well as helicopters, and other aid delivered by air force Hercules aircraft, helped provide an unseen benefit.

The deployment of military humanitarian aid drew considerable media attention, but Australia had been providing aid and development assistance to Indonesia for decades, working closely with the Indonesian National Development and Planning Agency (BAPPENAS) and civil society organizations and other community groups. This work spans education and scholarships, governance, human security and stability, disaster preparedness and risk reduction, emergency response, climate change and the environment, regional development, rehabilitation, health and infrastructure (ACICIS, 2020).

The infrastructure component has been noticeably linked to the Eastern Indonesia National Roads Improvement Program and the Indonesia Infrastructure Initiative as well as a range of other programs. This tallied nearly one billion Australian dollars in just one year (Australian National Audit Office, 2013). The Australia Indonesia partnership for Recovery and Development was established after the tsunami working to a governance board established by the Australian prime minister and the Indonesian president (Australian National Audit Office, 2013).

Reaffirming Ties

Australia Indonesia relations improved further with the signing in November 2006 of "The Agreement between Australia and the Republic of Indonesia on the Framework for Security Cooperation", known as the "Lombok Treaty". This provided a treaty-level framework for addressing traditional and non-traditional security challenges (DFAT, 2010).

In Late 2010 and early 2011 President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and then Chief of Defence Force (now Governor General) General David Hurley, agreed to set up an Australia-Indonesia military alumni association, known as

Ikahan (IKAHAN, 2012). This alumni network has helped to strengthen ties between the two nations' armed forces. The network of alumni has grown and contributed to the establishing of exchange instructor postings at the respective military officer training institutions and exchange cadet students.

In August 2014, Australia and Indonesia reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations by signing a Joint Understanding in implementation of the Lombok Treaty (DFAT, 2014). This allowed for the development of supporting mechanisms for formal two-plus-two dialogue meetings between their respective defence and foreign ministers (Parameswaran, 2018).

The 2014 Joint Understanding laid important groundwork for the creation of a sub-regional defence ministers meeting on counter-terrorism held in Perth, Western Australia, in February 2018 that was intended to enhance regional cooperation to counter terrorism (Payne, 2018).

Further Disruptions

Still, significant albeit temporary interruptions have made managing the bilateral relationship sometimes tricky. This includes a temporary ban placed on live cattle trade from Australia to Indonesia in 2011, following a television documentary showing cruelty to animals in an abattoir in Indonesia (Willingham & Allard, 2011).

In 2013, then Prime Minister Tony Abbott insisted on pushing back boats carrying refugees – a move which caused resentment in Indonesia and a disruption to people smuggling networks operating there (Bachelard, 2014). That same year, revelations from Edward Snowden's cache of documents indicated the Indonesian phone networks were being monitored (Dorling & Bachelard, 2014). Indonesia's president responded graciously in public, mindful Australian intelligence had helped address domestic terrorist incidents including the Bali bombings, but he was understandably upset about this act. The matter was not

helped by Abbott's refusal to provide an abject apology (Bachelard, 2013). Indonesia recalled its ambassador in protest, and the gradual build-up of trust was damaged by these events (Davidson & Weaver, 2013).

Sometime later, Abbott appealed for clemency for convicted criminals Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran (ABC News, 2015). Not surprisingly, his appeal was ignored. This followed an early incarceration in 2005 of Australian convicted drug smuggler, Schapelle Corby in Bali. Eventually, on appeal, her sentence was reduced and she was released on parole in 2014 and later allowed to return to Australia in May 2017 (Bachelard, 2014). Australia's blunt diplomacy had a blow-back effect. Hopefully the lesson has been learned that mutual respect is of fundamental importance to constructive bilateral relations.

Then in early 2017, Indonesian military chief, General Gatot Nurmantyo suspended cooperation over apparently offensive material observed on a training exercise by Indonesian soldiers training in Australia (Wood, 2017). His actions reflected a build-up of resentment over cultural insensitivity and a certain apparent Australian high handed, and heavy handed interaction. Australia needs to do better. So does Indonesia. Thankfully, Nurmantyo's successor is less conspiratorial and adversarial in his disposition towards Australia.

These incidents point to some short sighted and unfortunate complications to the bilateral relationship and to the need to work to deepen and strengthen ties if these kinds of problems are to be avoided in future. To avoid a recurrence both sides need to work collaboratively, showing mutual respect. Some innovative thinking and reappraisal is required.

Reversing the Decline: Bolstering Security, Trade and Education Ties

Since the issues of beef, boats, spies and clemency, both countries sensibly have worked to put the past behind them and deepen ties for trusted mutual collaboration. This has manifested in the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA), which came into force in July 2020. IA-CEPA builds on AusAID's decades-long role in various development assistance projects in Indonesia, particularly in the Eastern Indonesia regions. The IA-CEPA also creates a framework for Australia and Indonesia to "unlock the vast potential of the bilateral economic partnership, fostering economic cooperation between businesses, communities and individuals" (DFAT, 2020).

In view of this multi-faceted partnership emerging, IA-CEPA has the potential to add considerable trade and educational links to increase the "ballast" in the relationship to enable the "ship" of bilateral relations to weather future storms that might arise when misunderstandings occur or when interests may not completely coincide. As Indonesia's economy grows, demand for Australian goods likely will increase. Additional educational collaboration should be a priority to enhance mutual understanding – particularly in the realm of culture and language.

In the 1990s, Australia placed emphasis on learning to speak Bahasa Indonesia. But after the Bali bombings and Australia's distractions with the wars in the Middle East, the Australian nation got distracted. Bahasa Indonesia language skills atrophied as Australia emphasized learning languages for its niche contributions to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Blaxland eds, 2020). With Australia's focus on the Middle East declining, and the nation undertaking a "pivot" back to its own neighborhood, the importance of learning Bahasa Indonesia has returned to the fore. Australian government policy now needs to catch up and re-emphasize learning Indonesian.

Beyond language skills, strengthening the bilateral defence relationship won't necessarily be easy (Schreer, 2013). The days where the Indonesian armed

forces were eager recipients of Australian defence aid are past as Indonesia has become more capable and self-sufficient. Indonesia will always be Australia's most important regional strategic relationship, but the reverse has not necessarily always been the case. Yet these two countries have shared interests and concerns that should motivate much closer collaboration. Both face considerable exercise of Chinese sharp power and wolf warrior diplomacy. In Indonesia's case that has revolved around contestation over Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone surrounding the Natuna Islands. In Australia's case it revolves around challenging China's attempts at interfering in Australian politics. Both countries also have important trade ties with China. Australia has a formal alliance with the United States, but both look to the United States to maintain its security presence in Southeast Asia.

In future, defence cooperation should go beyond obvious and simple arrangements such as staff exchanges, military exercises or humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. New creative cooperation is needed in terms enhancing capabilities and interoperability – the ability to work together to manage the maritime space in the top right hand corner of the Indian Ocean – what President Joko Widodo once described as the "maritime fulcrum" (Laksamana, 2019).

Figure 1: The shared space occupied by Australia and Indonesia

Strengthening single service cooperation between the Australian and Indonesian armed forces also is critical to building trust and to hedge against future crisis. Australia's new amphibious capability, for instance is proving to be a "game changer" and provide significant new opportunities for collaboration (Blaxland, 2020). Indonesian and Australian forces should consider liking arms, getting on board and deploying on exercises and humanitarian assistance activities in and around Australia and Indonesia. This way they can build bridges, literally and metaphorically. Building bridges (with engineers) in the field in remote islands or coastline of Australian and or Indonesia, while building relationships between these two nation's armed forces to enable greater coordination, collaboration, trust and respect. Joint maritime surveillance is another underdeveloped area of cooperation and more needs to be done in this area, as is discussed further below in the context of sweetening regional ties.

Sweeter Regional Ties

There is scope for the Australian-Indonesia security relationship to return to the level of cooperation and trust that led to the Lombok Treaty in the mid-1990s. There is also space for Australia and Indonesia to lead in a sweet arrangement, a MANIS regional maritime cooperation forum, encompassing Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and Singapore. Other countries like Timor L'este, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines could be invited to participate (adding PPT to MANIS, perhaps). These countries have many common interests and concerns and have few opportunities to work together other than in the sidelines of other forums, notably ASEAN related meetings. Yet they all share the space at the juncture between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, what President Joko Widodo described as the "Maritime fulcrum" of the Indo-Pacific. This concept was introduced in a recent paper but requires further close consideration for the idea to become a reality (Blaxland, 2016).

A MANIS regional maritime cooperation forum could be organized in a number of ways, depending on the consensus of the participating nations. With a view to the sensitivities of Indonesia and others, it would be best to start slowly. Over time, the forum could generate goodwill and political momentum to grow. Ideally the political leadership of participating states would see the utility of gradually building up the forum and associated networks of contacts and issues covered, broadening and deepening the range of issues shared and addressed collaboratively.

Starting with a second track or one-and-a-half track approach would probably be easier, rather than launching into a fully-fledged governmental initiative. One way to do so would be to establish working groups to examine a range of non-traditional security concerns.

Topics on which regional representatives could consult, share experiences and cooperate are the security implications of region-wide challenges including climate change, illegal fisheries, natural resources management, illegal immigration, terrorism, smuggling and transnational crime, including trafficking in drugs, endangered wildlife and weapons. The forum could also focus on improving search and rescue and natural disaster coordination.

That approach would involve collaborative government, university and think tank teams from the various participating countries meeting to form working groups to discuss a range of possibilities including police, immigration, border security, legal, judicial, environmental, intelligence, and financial matters. Such encounters could examine shared issues of concern and other information exchanges, including on operating procedures. They also could consider possible collaborative activities to facilitate closer engagement and cross-pollination of personnel, ideas and sharing of experiences.

Ultimately, this Forum could take regional cooperation beyond the levels achieved through the Bali Process and help to better address the implications of a

new security agenda centered on environmentally vulnerable communities and climate change.

Eventually, if successful and mutually agreed to, military and other security concerns could feature under this framework as well. For instance, maritime security measures could be workshopped and collaborative activities developed. Efforts could be made to help regional coast-watching aerial surveillance patrols to be coordinated, more information exchanged and additional police and other liaison and exchange positions established.

Those arrangements would then enable the participating nations to consider coordinated and shared activities. Such activities could gradually build up, starting with conferences and workshops, to planning meetings, demonstrations and, eventually, actual collaborative exercises and operational activities. In time, and with the goodwill and agreement of the participants, such activities could utilize a range of civil and military resources to plan and conduct a range of related activities together.

Critics may argue there are too many regional forums already. But existing forums have great difficulty reaching consensus. A smaller grouping like MANIS would find it easier. Potentially, it could be empowered to bolster regional stability in and around Indonesia and the areas governed by the affected neighboring states in a way that circumvents the existing consensus-driven constraints. Enhancing cooperation and collaboration this way, with timely and consultative decision-making by participating nations, could significantly bolster stability and prosperity in areas of mutual concern.

A MANIS regional forum wouldn't make redundant the region's other bilateral and multilateral forums and arrangements. Indeed, foreign ministries are already stretched thin with responsibilities relating to ASEAN, let alone other forums. With a maritime focus and additional resources, perhaps the respective ministries of defence or border protection may be better placed to take the lead in engaging with the MANIS forum.

With a growing range of maritime and non-traditional security challenges, there's a compelling argument to be made for the countries of Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and Singapore to join hands and work together in a new way. This could be something far more than a straightforward multilateral forum. With unprecedented and growing challenges, there is an opportunity for the MANIS countries to work together across a wide range of domains to bolster shared regional stability. The way ahead involves respectful, patient, collegial and determined collaborative engagement to sweeten regional ties.

Conclusion

Despite all the ups and downs along the way, Australia and Indonesia are indeed at the fulcrum of the Indo-Pacific. They need to work together more closely now more than ever for the sake of their mutual economic and security interests.

Australia and Indonesia have many cultural differences but they are not natural adversaries. They have common interests and concerns. Australians need to invest more in learning about Indonesia and both countries should work on addressing the pandemic together and finding a way through to health, safety and economic prosperity on the other side. Some creative engagement is required. MANIS is one idea, IA-CEPA provides other opportunities, as does the New Colombo Plan and the *Ikahan* network. Joint initiatives to counter environmental degradation and in response to climate change would help. Indonesia and Australia have a shared destiny. Both countries need to work hard to make that destiny a peaceful and prosperous one.

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NAHDLATUL ULAMA AND ITS COMMITMENT TOWARDS MODERATE POLITICAL NORMS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE ABDURRAHMAN WAHID AND JOKOWI ERA

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Abstract

This article addresses recent development related to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) – Indonesia's largest Islamic organization - and its recent actions as it faces ideological and political challenges from other conservative Islamist organizations. In the process, NU seems to have engaged in backtracking its commitment to consistently promote moderate norms like democracy and tolerance toward different religious and political viewpoints. It examines the factors which explains this reversal and answers the following research puzzle: Under which socio-political conditions do a religious organization that has adhered to follow moderate political norms and discourses decide to backtrack from them and decide to pursue policies to embrace an 'exclusivist moderation'? The article concludes the declining commitment to moderate norms within the NU is due to growing ideological competition from conservative Islamists both within and outside of the organization, leading NU to embrace immoderate responses to crack down against its competitors.

Keywords: Political Islam, moderate Islam, democracy, Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama.

Introduction

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) – Indonesia's largest Islamic organization – is long known as a champion of moderate political norms such as religious moderation, tolerance, and democracy. This was enshrined during the 1990s, when NU's leading clerics and activists became frequent critic of Indonesia's former dictator Suharto and contributed to his ouster during the 1998 *Reformasi.* However, 22 years later, NU has come increasingly under fire for the actions of its leaders and

activists that are contrary to the norms he had advocated above. For instance, on November 27, 2019, Said Aqil Siradj – the general chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), issued a statement that his organization is now supporting the abolishment of direct presidential election in Indonesia - the largest Muslim-majority country in the world (The Jakarta Globe, 2019). Said Aqil also delivered a speech which stated that NU clerics and preachers should take over all mosques, Islamic courts, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. He claimed NU is "the only true moderate Indonesian Muslim group" - inferring that other Islamic clerics from non-NU organizations are harboring 'wrong' (read: 'radical') views (Atriana, 2019).

In addition, NU is increasingly being fraught by the actions made by its activists to disrupt and blocked events hosted by conservative Islamic groups and preachers with different theological and political views from the organization. GP Ansor, its youth wing – has blocked rallies sponsored by Islamist groups such as Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and popular Islamist preachers like Abdul Somad and Felix Siauw, on the grounds that these groups are threatening the unity of the Indonesian state. Lastly, NU-affiliated clerics and activist have been implicated in a wave of persecution against Muslim minority sects such as Shi'a minorities in Sampang, East Java and Ahmadis in Kuningan, West Java (Suryana, 2019; Kayane, 2020; Miichi and Kayane, 2020). The intolerant action of NU activists against these minority groups have raises questions regarding the organization's commitments to its long-cherished norms of tolerance and pluralism. Finally, a recent survey of Indonesian Muslims attitudes on the religious minorities in Indonesian politics and society revealed that NU members are no more tolerant than the general Muslim population in Indonesia. The survey also found that NU followers are more intolerant toward non-Muslims on a wide range of tolerance measures compared to those of

Muhammadiyah – Indonesia's second largest Islamic organization[1] (Mietzner and Muhtadi, 2020: 71-77).

However, despite the rich and thought-provoking data offered by the aforementioned studies, we still do not know the processes that lead to the organization's backsliding in its commitment to democratic and tolerant norms. I disagree with the assertion that pluralism in the NU is merely a 'myth' and that it is merely "rhetorical instruments to defend key organizational interests" (Mietzner and Muhtadi, 2020: 62). Instead, I show in the article that pluralism and moderation is a contested norm within the NU – both when it was introduced and enacted by Abdurrahman Wahid and his allies during the 1980s and during the subsequent decades. As religious competition and decreasing religious authority in Indonesia increases after the *Reformasi* era, internal contestation over these norms within the NU also increases as well. It is this internal contestation and rivalry between moderate-leaning NU clerics and activists and those who adhered to more conservative theological positions within the NU that contributed to the inconsistent attitudes of the organization's activist's responses toward questions of moderation and pluralism in recent years. This internal competition between moderates and conservatives within the organization has incentivized NU leaders to adopt more exclusivist policies against its Islamist rivals outside of the organization as well as against its activists who have conservative Islamist ideological leanings in recent years.

In this article, I argue that currently NU is backsliding into a path of *exclusivist moderation,* defined here as: *the willingness of a religious group to enact and implement policies designed exclude their ideological rivals from the public sphere, while continuing the lip service of promoting moderate norms and discourses the organization has long advocated*. Previously under Abdurrahman Wahid's leadership, the NU was

[1] The survey finds, for instance, that 54 percent of NU followers objects to the construction of non-Muslim houses of worship within their communities, compared to 39 percent of Muhammadiyah followers. 52 percent of NU followers also objects to non-Muslims to be elected as district heads or mayor of their localities, compared to 41 percent of Muhammadiyah followers (Mietzner and Muhtadi 2020: 76).

pursuing *inclusivist moderation*, defined here as: *the degree by which a religious group is willing to moderate its theological views and political outlook and to accept and tolerate any political and religious viewpoints without any conditions or exceptions*. The current ideological contestation between moderate and conservative factions within the NU and how it affects the organization's commitment toward moderate political norms is creating a research puzzle that is of interest to scholars – not just those who study Islam in Indonesia, but also those who study Islamic movements and political Islam in general. The research puzzle is: *under which socio-political conditions do a religious organization that has adhered to follow moderate political norms and discourses decide to backtrack from them and decide to pursue policies to embrace an exclusivist moderation, especially toward their ideological rivals?*

The first section of the article is a reflection on the inclusion-moderation theory, and the gaps to the theory related to how do ideological rivalry could have influenced a religious organization to credibly commit to pursue moderate norms or alternatively to lead these groups to waver from such a commitment. However, the inclusion-moderation theory is not able to explain how ideological contestation, factionalism, and other internal dynamics within the organization affects the degree of commitments by the organization's leaders to adhere to its commitment toward moderate norms they had supported earlier. The section also discusses the relevance of the NU case to enhance scholarly understanding of the inclusion-moderation theory. The second section analyzes NU's ideological moderation under Abdurrahman Wahid's leadership. It finds that that the moderate norms Wahid first promoted upon assuming office was able to be sustained due to the combination of his own charismatic leadership and support from the Suharto regime's apparatus, enabling him to marginalize internal and external challenges against his rule. The third section details the growing ideological competition within the NU under Said Aqil Siradj's leadership – driven by both internal factionalism and external competition with other conservative Islamist groups. It also discusses the NU leadership's alliance with

the Jokowi regime, the increasingly sectarian language they deployed against their critics both within and outside of the organization and how these contributed to the organization's backsliding from consistently promoting moderate Islamic norms over the past few years. Lastly, the concluding section contains lessons learned from the analysis of moderation backsliding within the NU, which can improve upon the inclusion-moderation and 'marketplace of ideas' theses - with particular emphasis on explaining how do the political actions Islamic movements which aligned itself with the ruling regime has contributed to the ongoing democratic backsliding in Indonesia.

The methodology deployed in this article is derived from analysis of historical and secondary data sources that are utilized to construct analytical narratives which traces the leadership of Abdurrahman Wahid and Said Aqil Siradj and how do they each handle ideological challenges from internal and external challenges from conservative Islamists. The process tracing method[2] is deployed to construct analytic narratives on the NU case. Empirical data for the analysis is obtained through making inferences from reading historical and previous studies about the NU and its relations with the Indonesian state and other Islamic groups, analysis of Indonesian newspapers and digital media, and interviews with several NU clerics and activists.

Inclusion – Moderation Theory: An Overview

Originally proposed to explain the moderation of ideological parties in Europe and Latin America (Huntington, 1993; Mainwaring & Scully, 2003), inclusion-moderation theory began to be applied in the case of Islamic parties and

[2]Process tracing is a methodology which utilizes historical narratives 'to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and…the dependent variable' (George and Bennett 2005: 206). This article applies the method by constructing analytic narratives linking the main explanatory variable (religious competition) to analyze the varying outcome in the commitment toward moderation within the NU during the 1980s and 1990s (Wahid leadership) and during the 2010s (Said Aqil Siradj's leadership).

movements during the 2000s.[3] One definition of *moderation* is how "institutions and political opportunities provide incentives for previously excluded groups to enter the system, abandon more radical tactics, and 'play by the rules'" (Schwedler, 2011: 352). Another definition is "a movement away from an unyielding ideology to one which is more malleable" (Abdullah, 2018: 408). While a more nuanced definition of moderation is "the abandonment of rigid ideologies to accept democratic principles - including the peaceful alternation of power, ideological and political pluralism, and citizenship rights" (Wickham, 2004: 206).

Building from these definitions, I define *moderation* as a movement from an ideologically rigid political principle into one grounded on progressive political norms such as democracy, tolerance, and pluralism. Practitioners should at least tolerate other viewpoints expressed by their opponents. The promotion of these moderate norms should not only be conducted in words, but also in deeds - particularly toward one's ideological and political opponents. Moderation also means a formal rejection of the application of Islamic law (*sharia*) as one of the state's legal foundation, although some moderate Muslims might favor the application of the law among members of their community.

The definition of *conservative Islamists* also requires an explanation. I define it as individuals or groups of Muslims who believe in the literal Islamic interpretation according to the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet (Sunnah). This includes a belief in the application of Islamic law (*sharia*) as a societal, legal, and political foundation of a Muslim-majority state. However, conservative Islamists usually advocates for the implementation of these beliefs through peaceful, democratic means such as participating in elections and peaceful protests. This contrasts with *hard-liners* or *radical Islamists*, who often pursues their

[3] First generation studies applying inclusion-moderation theory to Islamic parties and movements include Kalyvas (2000); Wickham (2004); and Schwedler (2006).

implementation by utilizing both verbal rhetoric and/or physical violence against religious minorities and other ideological opponents, such as moderate Muslims.

Under *behavioral moderation*, it is assumed that Islamic parties and groups will follow structural and institutional changes initiated by the state and participate in elections and other non-violent means of political expression, abandoning their formerly 'radical' goals (e.g., advocating for an Islamic state) and adopting more moderate goals and strategies. The main logic underlying behavioral moderation is strategic calculation (Schwedler, 2011: 352) which is based on a simple cost-benefit calculation reached by party or movement leaders to pursue peaceful political strategy such as participating in elections and peaceful protests given their potentially more positive payoffs rather than risking further state repression. *Ideological moderation* – which is harder to measure and operationalize compared to structural changes like changing regime type or policy – is assumed to occur after the group has participated in elections or pursued other non-violent political strategies (Schwedler, 2011: 355). This simplistic assumption was questioned by latter proponents of the theory, who argued that in addition to strategic calculations, ideological changes and leaders' decisions also play an important role in influencing whether an Islamic group will embrace political moderation. Ideological moderation does not always follow behavioral ones, and neither change is always attributable to greater political opening (Tezcur, 2010, cited in Schwedler, 2011: 364).

While the inclusion-moderation theory is now more contextualized and nuanced thanks to the modifications made by later scholars who incorporated ideational and leadership variables into their analyses, it still suffers from several shortcomings. The moderation process shown in most studies utilizing the theory is still one directional, where a religious party or group moves from radical into a broadly defined moderate direction. However, it is unclear whether this process can be reversed – either wholly or partially – in a given political context. This shortcoming has been rectified in several recent studies (Jaffrelot, 2013; Pahwa,

2017). They show that these parties or groups can move back-and-forth between immoderate and moderate ideological positions over a long period of time, depending on the changing political opportunity structure that exists within a given period (Jaffrelot, 2013). Ideological challenge from rival factions within the same party or group can also force it to backtrack and pursue more ideologically conservative agenda from its more accommodative strategies (Pahwa, 2017). Nonetheless, there are other gaps within the inclusion-moderation theory that has not been adequately addressed. In particular, the theory is silent on how localized variables such as organizational cohesion and level of religious competition faced by a particular religious organization helped to motivate them to either moderate itself further or reverse it (Pelletier, 2021: 2-3).

How do the internal dynamics within a religious group – particularly the degree of competition it encounters from other co-religionist groups– affect its commitment to pursue moderation – can be explained through the concept of the marketplace of ideas. It is defined as a market of Muslim believers where "previously suppressed and marginalized groups could promote different interpretations of Islamic theology, using innovative new media outlets." (Arifianto, 2020a: 39).[4] As a consequence of increasing religious competition under this growing marketplace, Islamic religious authority – which formerly was dominated by clerics and activists affiliated by NU and Muhammadiyah – Indonesia's two largest Islamic organizations – are increasingly being fragmented – as many Indonesian Muslims are now attracted to new theologically more conservative Islamic groups ranging from various quietist and non-political Salafi sects to openly political Islamist groups, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), and others.[5] In addition, various new Islamist preachers managed to win broad

[4] The new proselytization outlets utilized by these Islamist groups include the internet and physical outlets like mosques, campus preaching organizations, and community-based preaching groups (majelis taklim).
[5] For further in-depth analysis on these new Islamist groups, see for instance van Bruinessen (2013), Facal (2020), and Sebastian et al (2021).

popular appeal among Indonesian Muslims, particularly those from the millennial generation – due to their charismatic, populist, yet theologically conservative sermons that managed to attract millions of social media followers.[6] The growing influence of these new Islamic groups and preachers have contributed to a growing decline in the authority of NU and Muhammadiyah, which as I argue in the latter sections, contributes to the political move of the former to align itself with the Jokowi regime and work together to push back and exclude many of these Islamist groups from the public sphere.

Thanks to the growth of these new Islamic groups and preachers, along with new innovative outlets of religious propagation such as campus preaching organizations (Arifianto, 2019) and social media (Slama, 2017; Akmaliah, 2020) - Islamic authority in Indonesia is fragmenting further as many ordinary Muslims are no longer primarily relying on the authority of NU and Muhammadiyah. Instead, they are now able to seek and follow alternative sources of Islamic knowledge and authority represented by these new Islamic group, preachers, and political activists.

Indonesia's democratic transition in 1998 brought about increased freedom of expression and freedom of religion that makes the country to have a pluralist religious authority and a more competitive marketplace of ideas. Religious authority. – the ability to speak religious leaders authoritatively about one's own religious teachings and doctrines – are increasingly being contested by new entrants, undermining the authority of established Islamic groups such as NU and Muhammadiyah (Pelletier, 2021; Arifianto, 2020a). Hence, it is appropriate for us to analyze how do increased competition within the Islamic religious marketplace in Indonesia has affected NU's commitment to promote moderate norms.

[6] These popular preachers include Hanan Attaki, founder of the Hijrah Youth (*Pemuda Hijrah*) movement (8.3 million Instagram followers), Abdullah Gymnastiar, founder of the Daurat Tauhid Pesantren (5.9 million followers), and Felix Siauw, Chinese Indonesian Muslim convert who is thought to have affiliated himself with HTI (4.7 million) (Arifianto 2020b: 120).

There is certainly an ever-growing number of new scholarships regarding the NU and the role it has played in Indonesian politics.[7] However, NU has not received much scholarly attention from political scientists seeking to test the applicability of the inclusion -moderation in Indonesia. Menchik (2014 & 2016) utilizes the inclusion-moderation theory to analyze NU (and Muhammadiyah) attitudes on (in)tolerance for religious minorities in Indonesia. However, his study did not outline an in-depth process detailing moderate and pluralist discourses were articulated, debated, and instituted within NU over the past few decades. Meanwhile, Pelletier (2021) applies religious economy theory to explain the variation in the level of religious persecution against religious minorities by Islamists. He finds higher level of persecution in regions where the Islamic religious market is more competitive and religious authority more decentralized. However, this study does not examine how the level of competition faced by a mainstream religious group affect its willingness to credibly commit to moderate actions when it deals with its competitors in the religious market.

Indonesian specialists and scholars of Islamic politics can learn a great deal from the study of how moderation evolved within the NU and how increased religious competition have contributed to the changing commitment for moderation within the organization. Competition for religious authority – both internal and external of NU – has existed in varying decrees throughout NU's history. This is because it is a highly decentralized organization divided based upon ideologies and allegiances to different senior ulama (*kyai*), who served as factional leaders and power brokers within the organization. These senior ulama use both material benefits and charisma derived from genealogical linkages with the families of NU's founders to gain and retain their followers. In addition, these ulama generally respect each other's authority within the boundaries of the Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) that each of them led (Barton, 2002: 139).

[7] See van Bruinessen 1994; Fealy 1998; Hefner 2000; Barton 2002; Bush 2009; Menchik 2016 & 2019; Kayane 2020; and Mietzner and Muhtadi 2020.

However, this custom helps to create disagreement and conflict between these ulama when it is brought up at the organizational level. When it comes to external competition, NU has long differentiated itself from other Islamic competitors by labeling itself as a 'traditionalist' instead of 'modernist' (or more recently 'Islamist') which it claims to be more compatible with Indonesian cultural traditions. NU leaders then utilize such differentiations in a sectarian-like manner to attack, marginalize and exclude their rivals (Van Bruinessen, 1994; Bush, 2009).

During Wahid's chairmanship in the 1980s, NU managed to occupy dominant status in the Islamic religious marketplace due to the as the Suharto regime's repression of conservative Islamists during this period. Hence NU – along with modernist-leaning Muhammadiyah – held a duopoly market share[8] within the Islamic religious marketplace during the 1980s and 1990s[9] – so much so that both are considered as the official representatives of 'moderate' Indonesian Islam by the Suharto regime – a designation that continues to be applied to these groups by successive post-Reformasi regimes to the present day. At the same time, Wahid managed to deal with his rivals within NU through his utilization of charismatic leadership attributes and alliance with the Suharto regime during the early years of his chairmanship (1984 to 1990). As a result, NU faced fewer internal and external ideological competitors which enables Wahid and his allies to propagate moderate Islamic norms both within and outside of the NU with fewer ideological constraints.

However, after Suharto's downfall and subsequent democratic transition in 1998, the Islamic religious market becomes very competitive, given that

[8] While there is a long history of NU versus Muhammadiyah sectarian-like animosity dated back to the 1920s, both organizations have largely respected each other's boundaries by the 1980s. Given the clearly marked ritualistic practices of both organizations, there were few conversions between the followers of both groups during this time.

[9] There are indications that increased competition from other Islamic groups might have reduced the number of followers for both groups. A recent survey estimated the number of Muhammadiyah followers at 5 percent of Indonesian Muslims (Mietzner and Muhtadi 2020, 71). This translates to approximately 12 million Indonesians – a much smaller number than the 30 million figure the organization often claims.

hundreds of Islamic groups from a wide range of ideological and political perspectives are able to propagate their beliefs in Indonesia while facing no state-imposed restrictions (until very recently). By 2010s, these new groups – ranging from Muslim Brotherhood's influenced Justice and Development Party (PKS), Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) – and others are increasingly perceived as ideological threats by NU leadership led by Said Aqil Siradj. Within the NU, new conservative factions such as 'Straight Path NU' (*NU Garis Lurus*) were founded to challenge the dominance of the moderate NU leadership. In response to these internal and external challenges, NU leaders put more priority to protect its status as one of Indonesia's leading Islamic organization and align themselves with the Jokowi regime to contain their rivals using coercive measures – instead of utilizing democratic and tolerant norms to resolve their conflicts with Islamists.

NU's Inclusivist Moderation under Abdurrahman Wahid

Founded in 1926, NU is an Islamic organization consisting of traditionalist-oriented ulama and their *jama'ah*, with current estimated followers of approximately 60 million Indonesian Muslims.[10] For the first six decades of its existence – from its 1926 founding to the path breaking 1984 National Congress (*muktamar*), the NU was known as an organization which supported a conservative interpretation of Islamic law (*shari'a*) similar to numerous other conservative Islamic organizations. During the deliberation of the National Committee for the Preparation of Indonesia's Independence (BPUPKI) in June 1945, NU leaders endorsed the Jakarta Charter – a clause proposed for the draft Indonesian Constitution - which would require all Indonesian Muslims to observe the *shari'a* law in their socio-political lives (Fealy, 1996: 19). The clause was

[10] This number is only an estimation as NU does not keep a precise tally of how many followers it actually has. Much of the people affiliated with this number can be considered "Cultural NU" (*NU Kultural*) - people whose ritual practices and traditions are closer to NU but are not part of the everyday activities and decision-making circles of the organization – whether at national, regional, or local levels. Those belonging to the latter can be considered "Structural NU" (*NU Struktural*).

removed from the final draft of the constitution announced after Indonesia's declaration of independence in August 1945 after objections from nationalist and non-Muslim BPUPKI members.

In 1959, when Indonesia's Constituent Assembly was debating a new Indonesian constitution, NU representatives proposed an amendment which declared not only "that the Jakarta Charter be made the official preamble to the new Constitution, but…that the requirement for Muslims to follow the *shari'a* be added to the body of the Constitution as well" (Bush, 2009: 54). During the height of authoritarian Suharto rule in the 1970s, NU was able to block the government from enacting a secularist-oriented marriage bill that sought to limit polygamy as well as the authority of Islamic courts to legalize marriage (Bush, 2009: 68). Senior NU clerics during this period frequently issued statements that the Indonesian national ideology *Pancasila* was merely a 'man-made ideology,' and that it contradicted the Islamic belief in a monotheistic God (*tauhid*) (Kadir 1999: 181). By analyzing the actions of NU leaders and activists during this period, we can establish that at the time NU had a conservative political theology that influenced its political actions. This position was taken consistently even though NU was willing to participate in the 1955 general election (Feith, 1962).

By the mid-1970s, through its participation in the officially sanctioned Islamic party called the United Development Party (PPP), NU was one of the few groups expressing frequent opposition to the Suharto regime's policy – particularly those related to Islamic affairs. The regime responded to NU's growing opposition against its rule during this period by stripping the organization of its traditional position as Minister of Religious Affairs in 1972, which was usually awarded to a senior NU ulama for nearly two decades. The regime also cut subsidies for Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) ran by the NU, leaving clerics increasingly called for NU to stop its opposition against Suharto's policies (Bush, 2009: 70-71). More measures against the organization was taken in 1982, when Suharto issued a new decree which required all sociopolitical

groups and civil society organizations to adopt the national ideology *Pancasila* as their sole ideological foundation or risk losing their legal status and be classified as illegal organizations (Kadir, 1999: 198).

Faced with more restrictive political opportunity structure and the threat of further state reprisal, NU was forced into a difficult political choice on whether to continue its opposition against the regime and risk further sanctions and reprisal, or to accept *Pancasila* - which it formerly considered a man-made political ideology - in exchange for relief from the regime's reprisal and the restoration of government subsidies to its *pesantren* schools and universities. In 1984, a group of young NU activists led by Abdurrahman Wahid took over the 1984 NU National Congress (*muktamar*) in Situbondo, with the blessing of several senior clerics who were dissatisfied against the organization's former leaders (Arifianto, 2012: 112-114). The *muktamar* declared that NU would withdraw from active political participation and would also accept Pancasila as its official ideology, ending its demand that Indonesia should be turned into an Islamic state. Instead, it should endorse the principles of human rights, religious tolerance, and pluralism – to take into account Indonesia's multi-ethnic and religious society (Arifianto, 2012: 105-107).

Faced with more restrictive political opportunity structure and the threat of further state reprisal, NU was forced into a difficult political choice on whether to continue its opposition against the regime and risk further sanctions and reprisal, or to accept *Pancasila* - which it formerly considered a man-made political ideology - in exchange for relief from the regime's reprisal and the restoration of government subsidies to its *pesantren* schools and universities. In 1984, a group of young NU activists led by Abdurrahman Wahid took over the 1984 NU National Congress (*muktamar*) in Situbondo, with the blessing of several senior clerics who were dissatisfied against the organization's former leaders.[11]

[11] The senior NU clerics who supported the leadership change orchestrated by Wahid included Kyai Haji (KH) As'ad Syamsul Arifin, Ahmad Siddiq, and Ali Ma'shum. They supported Wahid due to different rationales. As'ad lent his support in order to gain more patronage funds for his *pesantren* (Barton, 2002,

The *muktamar* declared that NU would withdraw from active political participation and would also accept Pancasila as its official ideology, ending its demand that the Indonesian state should be based upon Islamic principles. Instead, it adopted a series of Islamic principles articulated by Ahmad Siddiq – a senior ulama who backed Wahid's leadership candidacy. These principles are *al-tawassut (moderate), al-tawazun (balance), al-i'tidal (justice), and al-tasamu (tolerance) (Burhani 2012: 570). By affirming these principles as those NU followers ought to follow, Wahid and Siddiq began to transform NU as a promoter of moderate norms – albeit with mixed results over the long run.* However, Wahid faced resistance from other senior clerics within NU, mainly from older 'political clerics'[12] who used to align NU closely with the Suharto regime but were sidelined by Wahid. These clerics included Idham Chalid - the former NU chairman that was removed by Wahid – who formed a rival leadership team within the NU (Bush, 2009: 82) and his own uncle Yusuf Hasyim – who was the last living son of NU founder Hasyim Asy'ari, hence possessed family genealogy that outranked Wahid – Asy'ari grandson and threatened his legitimacy (Barton, 2002: 176). These challenges imposed a threat against Wahid's power and authority as the leader of the largest and most dominant Islamic organization in Indonesia and his political survival.

Wahid resolved these leadership challenges from these 'political clerics' using a two-fold strategy: 1) Utilizing his charismatic appeal based on his familial genealogy to gain support from senior ulama within the NU, and 2) aligning closer with the Suharto regime to protect him from conservative Islamic challengers – while at the same time he framed himself as a moderate Islamic cleric who extolled democratic and pluralistic norms to Indonesian Muslims. Charismatic appeal is an important mechanism within a highly decentralized

149) while Siddiq and Ma'shum supported Wahid due to his family genealogy since Wahid was a grandson of NU's founder KH Hasyim Asy'ari (Barton 2002: 141 & 171).

[12] NU insiders made distinctions between 'political clerics' – those who sit on its national and regional leadership boards and are regularly interacting and lobbying politicians for a wide range of policies and favors with 'religious clerics' – those who take few or no part in everyday politics yet are deeply revered due to their spirituality and personal charisma (Bush 2009: 35-36).

Islamic organization like the NU to rally support among senior ulama who might otherwise use their personal autonomy to ignore decisions made by the organization's leaders. It is also instrumental to assure their public support towards NU leaders and to minimize the likelihood of other ulama to resist and issue a rival claim against their authority. Such an appeal is based on deep knowledge of Islamic texts and scriptures, personal attributes, and genealogical linkages with founding NU families (Arifianto, 2012: 110).

Utilizing his familial linkages as grandson of NU founder, Wahid manages to strengthen his power as NU chairman from the time he assumed office in 1984 until he stepped down due to his election as Indonesia's first democratically elected president in 1999. Due to such linkages, senior ulama like As'ad Syamsul Arifin who did not approve of the moderate norms instituted by Wahid became reluctant to publicly oppose him.[13] Numerous other senior ulama within the NU were also deferential towards Wahid and did not openly criticize him and the reforms he brought forward inside the NU due to his perceived charismatic attributes as well. While there remained opposition towards Wahid and towards the moderate norms he promoted, few leading ulama stepped forward to challenge him openly. When Wahid's uncle Yusuf Hasyim declared his candidacy to oppose his re-election during NU's national congress in 1989, he failed to gain the minimum of 40 NU branch votes necessary to contest the post, which allowed Wahid to be re-elected as chairman by acclamation (Barton, 2002: 176).

The Suharto regime's tough measures against 'radical' Islamists such as this certainly discouraged preachers and groups with Islamist leanings to engage in political mobilization and open recruitment to attract prospective converts to join their groups. Instead, these groups operated underground inside state university campuses, mosques, and other settings to recruit members through

[13] As'ad recognized that 'Wahid was the grandson of his teacher, Kyai Hasyim Asy'ari. Thus, he had to defer to Wahid as he would defer out of respect to his teacher' (Kadir 1999: 96).

small, cell-like study groups to escape detection from Suharto's intelligence apparatus (Arifianto, 2019: 329). While they were able to recruit a small number of dedicated cadres using these methods, the limited public space available under the Suharto regime prevented Islamists from being able to recruit large number of followers, leaving essentially NU – along with Muhammadiyah - as dominant groups within the Indonesian Muslim community during the 1980s and 1990s, hence clerics and activists from both groups constituted a hegemony over Islamic discourses and ideas in Indonesia during this period. While Islamic proselytization were tolerated and even encouraged by the regime, especially after Suharto underwent an 'Islamic turn' during the 1990s to bolster his support among the ranks of pious Muslims (Liddle, 1996), Islamists made few breakthroughs in obtaining mass popular appeal due to the strict public space restrictions imposed by the regime. Hence, NU retained its control of a significant share of Indonesia's Islamic religious marketplace.

Wahid also secured his position by aligning himself closer to the Suharto regime – at least during his first term as NU chairman from 1984 to 1989. Suharto – wary about the prospect of growing Islamism among middle class Indonesians enrolling in public universities– viewed Wahid, who advocated ideas such as compatibility between Islam and Indonesia's national ideology *Pancasila*, religious pluralism, and religion-state separation while rejecting an Islamic state, as a potential ally. However, he rejected Wahid's call to promote further political opening and democratic reforms (Barton, 2002: 151). In return, Wahid sought a closer alliance with the regime to minimize possible challenges against his power and authority as he consolidated his position within the NU.

However, unlike what was implied by some scholars, Wahid was not complacent against Suharto's tyrannical rule. He projected himself as an advocate for democracy and pluralism both within the NU and in the Indonesian public sphere through his regular sermons, public speeches, op-ed columns, and other venues. By the early 1990s, Suharto and Wahid had a fallen out after the former

began to court conservative Islamic activists to bolster his regime standing among the modernist Muslim constituency – a rival of Wahid and the NU (Barton 2002: 181). Afterwards, Wahid moved back and forth between expressing strong criticisms the regime whenever there was an opportunity to do so and making further accommodations towards the regime when it threatened harsh measures against him – for instance, Wahid's decision to endorse Suharto's final presidential term in 1996 and campaigned with his daughter Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana during the following year's general election campaign (Bush, 2009: 86-87). While some have criticized Wahid's inconsistencies in his dealings with the regime, others considered that they were 'a perfect method of dealing with an authoritarian regime with totalitarian aspirations' and that 'reactive rather than proactive' response toward the regime was probably the best strategy he could have pursued when dealing with an unpredictable regime such as Suharto (Barton, 2002: 369).

Wahid along with his counterparts mentored and inspired a new generation of NU activists who founded affiliate organizations and independent NGOs which promoted democratic and pluralist norms to NU followers during and after his chairmanship was concluded in 1999.[14] However, despite these notable achievements during his chairmanship, Wahid did not nominate a clear successor who would further institutionalize his ideas within the organization. The lack of Wahid protégé who became influential NU clerics has made conservative clerics to continue having some influence within the organization and eroded the propagation of the moderate norms Wahid had introduced after he stood down from the organization. The rationale for this decision – and for Wahid's numerous inconsistent decisions made during his tenure as NU

[14] Young NU activists who were inspired by Wahid include Ulil Abshar Abdalla (co-founder of the Liberal Islam Network (JIL), Rumadi Ahmad (current Executive Director of Lakpesdam – a NU affiliate which worked in the field of interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding) and Ahmad Suaedy (former Executive Director of the Wahid Foundation)

chairman and later, as Indonesia's fourth president, is best explained by Greg Barton:

> *[Wahid] was always a tactician, not a strategist. Although he was brilliant at short-term political plays….he seldom showed any sign of planning for the long term (Barton, 2002: 369)*

Towards Exclusivist Moderation: NU during the Reformasi Era

The lack of continuity of Wahid's ideas within NU was clearly seen after he was succeeded as Nahdlatul Ulama's general chairman by Hasyim Muzadi, a prominent *kyai* who was more theologically conservative. He purged the young NU activists who were close to Wahid from PBNU immediately upon assuming the chairmanship (Van Bruinessen, 2010). Under Muzadi's chairmanship, NU issued a clerical opinion (*fatwa*) condemning the minority Ahmadiyah Muslim sect (Brown, 2019: 408), following the *fatwa* issued by the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) which had condemned it earlier. Muzadi harshly criticized the Shi'a minorities, which have suffered from several acts of persecutions (Fealy, 2017). Local NU ulema and activists were accused of perpetuating and participating in these violent incidents, particularly those occurred in Sampang, East Java province (Suryana, 2019; Miichi and Kayane, 2020; Kayane, 2020).

In 2010, Muzadi – whose term as NU chairman had expired - was replaced by Said Aqil Siradj, a West-Java based NU scholar who had unsuccessfully challenged Hasyim in the race for NU chairmanship six years earlier. While Said Aqil was not close to the recently deceased Wahid and the NU activists who came under the latter's patronage, he was perceived to have a track record expressing tolerant views toward religious minorities and had promised to include more moderate NU activists in the organization's leadership board if he was elected NU chairman (Van Bruinessen, 2010). Upon assuming office, Said Aqil faced several challenges regarding NU's future. During the Suharto era, NU - along with Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's second largest Muslim organization- was

considered to have commanded the allegiance of the majority of Indonesian Muslims. By 2010, both NU and Muhammadiyah face a strong competition from dozens of new Islamic organizations with transnational linkages to Middle Eastern Islamist movements (Van Bruinessen, 2015: 13), further eroding their authority over the Indonesian Muslim community. Aided by generous financial assistance from their mother organizations and their innovative usages of social media technologies (Van Bruinessen, 2015: 12-14 & Arifianto, 2020a: 41), these new Islamist organizations have increasingly been able to compete with NU and Muhammadiyah and recruit their former followers – particularly those from the young millennial generation.

Within NU itself, authority has become more fragmented, especially during Said Aqil's chairmanship. This is because unlike Wahid, Said Aqil does not come from a prominent NU family or own a large *pesantren*.[15] This hinders him from obtaining a large number of support base from other prominent NU ulama to support his policies. Former NU chairman Hasyim Muzadi partnered with Solahuddin Wahid – Abdurrahman's younger brother who had a more conservative outlook to establish a separate faction within NU that was backed by most NU clerics based in East Java (interview with Asruddin Azwar, Depok, West Java, August 23rd 2019). Due to this lack of genealogical linkage with NU's founding fathers – a necessity attribute for a senior cleric to win support and loyalty from other senior clerics, Said Aqil aligned himself with senior Indonesian political figures such as Megawati Soekarnoputri – Sukarno's daughter and current PDI-P chairwoman. Hence, the strong ties between NU and PDI-P – both at the elite and grassroots level, help to cement their current political alliance, notwithstanding political frictions between Wahid and Megawati when both

[15] Said Aqil Siradj's pesantren in Cirebon, West Java only has about 500 students (*santri*) – a relatively small number considering that many prominent NU boarding schools – like Sidogiri in Pasuruan and Tebuireng and Lirboyo in Jombang, have more than 10,000 *santri* each, a testimony to their lineage as *pesantrens* which were founded by one of NU founding kyais (interview with Asruddin Aswar, Depok, West Java, August 23rd, 2019).

served together as Indonesian President and Vice President during the early years of Reformasi (Barton, 2002; Bush, 2009).

Internal challenges against the NU leadership also came from a group of young NU *kyai* who formed "Straight Path NU" (*NU Garis Lurus* or NUGL) – a new faction which seeks NU's return to its original founding principles and the removal of "liberal and pluralist ideologies" promoted by Abdurrahman Wahid and other reformers - on the ground they are not compatible with traditional Sunni Islamic (*Aswaja*) teachings (Iqbal, 2021: 104-105). NUGL was founded by Luthfi Bashori, Idrus Ramli, and Buya Yahya – all received advanced theological training in the Middle East and commanded large popular following both in person as well as in social media (Iqbal, 2021: 97-99). In addition, this NU faction was also supported by Abdul Somad – a Riau-born traditionalist Islamic preacher whom has become one of the prominent online preachers in Indonesia today. At the peak of his popularity Somad commanded 9.7 million Instagram followers – the highest among all conservative Islamist preachers (Akmaliah, 2020: 14).

While Somad is not considered as a NUGL founder, he does hold several leadership positions in the provincial branch of NU Riau, including a secretary of the NU Riau province's *Bahtsul Masa'il* (Islamic theological issues board) and a board member of the MUI Riau provincial branch (Iqbal 2021: 98). These positions give him a lot of theological legitimacy among NU followers, particularly those who sympathizes with NUGL agenda. The popularity of NUGL preachers is related to the fact that they propagate much of their preaching contexts via social media, which has become the most popular way for millennial-age Muslims to access Islamic knowledge (Arbuckle-Gultom & Sirait, 2019). The ideological challenges from NUGL and other conservative factions within the NU means that the organization's moderate-leaning leaders no longer have the ideological hegemony within and outside of the organization that they once did under the Wahid chairmanship.

In addition, NU activists have frequently expressed concerns toward the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* – PKS) and Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) – the Indonesian branch of the transnational Hizbut-Tahrir movement. Both groups are believed to have engaged in campaigns to take over the mosques and *pesantrens* affiliated with NU (van Bruinessen, 2015: 14) and their respective youth wings are thought to engage in aggressive recruitment of NU-affiliated students in public universities throughout Indonesia (Arifianto, 2019: 329-331 & Arifianto, 2020a: 41-42). PKS – through its youth wing the Islamic Muslim Students Action Union (KAMMI) and HTI have engaged in nationwide recruitment campaigns in the campuses of Indonesian state universities over the past two decades. Many university students – including those from NU background – were attracted to these groups because their egalitarian structures allowed them to advance through the ranks quickly compared to NU and Muhammadiyah youth preaching groups (Arifianto, 2020a: 41-42). PKS has also persuaded some NU *kyais* and their children in regions like East Java to run for national and regional legislative positions as its candidates, instead of through the National Awakening Party (PKB) – NU's electoral vehicle (Machmudi, 2021: 166).

Some younger NU clerics also have an affinity towards HTI – whom they considered as an ally in their fight against immorality and injustice within the Indonesian society. For instance, a deputy head of NU's East Java provincial branch states that:

> *NU and HTI are 'brothers-in-arms' (teman seperjuangan). While they may deploy different tactics and strategies, they share one common goal – to enact and implement Islamic law within the Indonesian society (interview with KH Abdurrahman Navis, Surabaya, February 13rd, 2017).*

NU leaders are concerned against competition from new Islamist movements and the fragmentation of their own authority, as factions like *NU Garis Lurus* are gaining followers within the NU ranks (Iqbal, 2021: 98-99). This – alongside material concerns like gaining additional access to state patronage

(Mietzner, 2018: 273-274) - motivated NU chairman Said Aqil to develop a closer alliance with the Jokowi regime.

During the 2015 NU *muktamar* in Jombang, NU chairman Said Aqil announced a new theological innovation, *Islam Nusantara*, which is designed not only of consolidating the moderates' hold over NU in the face of growing ideological challenges coming both from within and outside of NU. Derived from the term *pribumisasi Islam* (Islamic indigenization) coined by Wahid in an earlier article (Wahid, 1983), its proponents claimed that it is a synthesis which combines traditionalist Islamic theology and local customs, rituals, and traditions. As NU chairman Said Aqil Siradj states:

> *Islam Nusantara is an Indonesian-style Islam, which adopts Sunni Islam (Ahlusunnah wal jamaah) principles, which promotes tolerance, strengthens Islam as a blessing for humanity (rahmatan lil alamin), and is based on the principles of balance (tawazun), moderate (tawassut), tolerance (tasamu), and justice (i'tidal) (Hasyim 2018).*

Siradj further elaborates, *Islam Nusantara* is an affirmation of the NU to sit in the middle of two ideological poles, "the radical pole which is very rigid or strict and confrontational, and a liberal pole which is very compromising, permissive, and hedonist" (Siradj, 2010). NU leaders stated that Islam Nusantara is neither an 'alien' theology nor 'liberal' Islam. Instead, it is originated from the original interpretation of Sunni Islam (*Ahlul Sunnah wal Jama'ah*). Hence, NU inherits "the original interpretation of Sunni Islam that is now abandoned by most Middle Eastern Muslims. One that tolerates local cultural practices and also promotes nationalism – loyalty to one's own country."[16]

From the very start, Islam Nusantara was framed by NU leaders as an antidote to the perceived 'radicalism' of Indonesian Islam that is thought to have come from the influence of Islamist groups influenced by transnational ideologies. These groups – HTI, *Tarbiyah* Movement, and various Salafi groups – are often

[16] Interview with K.H. Marzuki Mustamar. General Chairman, Nahdlatul Ulama East Java Provincial Branch (Malang, East Java, February 7th, 2020).

lumped together as 'Wahhabis' or 'Saudi-Islamists' by *Islam Nusantara* proponents. The latter's acceptance of unorthodox customs and traditions has enabled its leaders to differentiate NU from other Sunni Islamic groups. This identity enables NU leaders to define itself in a sectarian-like manner. Drawing a metaphor similar to 'good Muslim' vs 'bad Muslim' analogy described by Mamdani (2004), NU and its 'moderate' Islam Nusantara theology is presented as 'good Muslims' vis-à-vis the 'alien' Islamists who brought 'foreign' and 'intolerant' Islamic interpretations to Indonesia.

For instance, senior NU *kyai* Mustofa Bisri declares that:

> *…genuine Islam, Islam Nusantara….has been supplanted by Saudi Islam, a grasping and materialistic Islam, coarse, cruel and savage. The Wahhabi view is just a ghoulish nightmare that keeps the world awake at night, trembling in horror (Loveard 2016).*

Islamist groups like HTI and PKS were also portrayed by NU senior clerics as "agents of Arabization" (Burhani 2018: 5). The ideological and political struggle between NU and these groups are considered by many NU activists as "being at least as important, if not more so, than violent struggles in the Middle East and South Asia and even efforts to counter domestic violent extremist group" (Woodward 2017: 240). In contrast, NU leaders portrayed their organization as:

> *promoters of moderate Islam that is compatible with the principles of the Pancasila and the Unitary State Republic of Indonesia (NKRI)…Pancasila turns Indonesia into a religious state. However, not a single religion may dominate and impose its will over the others. NU and the Jokowi regime are committed to promote Islam Nusantara as an antidote against both liberalism and Islamic radicalism/Wahhabism and to safeguard Indonesia's national unity (interview with KH Marzuki Mustamar, Malang, February 7th, 2020).*

NU's leadership under Siradj was united to promote Islam Nusantara and attack conservative Islamists. To be sure, there are many critics within the organization who opposed Siradj's promotion of Islam Nusantara, including his predecessor the late Hasyim Muzadi and clerics who are affiliated with *NU Garis Lurus*. However, since Siradj's faction is in full control of the NU leadership

board, he managed to sideline the critics very easily. Hence, even though NU is also fraught with multiple factions and has a significant Islamist contingent within the organization – its leadership was willing to use strong-arm tactics to marginalize more conservative factions and pushed them back into a more obscure public space.

In sum, NU has adapted an aggressive strategy to counter the perceived conservative Islamist challenge against its ideological and political hegemony over the right to speak on behalf of Indonesian Muslims. The organization utilizes its long history of differentiating itself from other Indonesian Islamic organizations by promoting a sectarian-like distinction between itself and conservative Islamists organizations whom it accuses to bring 'foreign' (Arabic) influences to divide Indonesian Muslims and to establish an Islamic or a caliphate state in Indonesia. This sectarian difference is also being utilized by NU leaders and activists to develop confrontational campaigns to disrupt the activities of hardline Islamist organizations that is perceived to be NU's main rivals to win the heart and minds of Indonesian Muslims, particularly the millennial age generation.

NU's campaign to articulate *Islam Nusantara* - both nationally and worldwide - received a strong endorsement from the Jokowi regime, as the president increasingly came under pressure from the conservative Islamist groups and was widely considered by hardline groups to have insufficient Islamic credentials. Jokowi felt even more threatened by these group after the 2016 Defending Islam rallies (*Aksi Bela Islam*) against former Jakarta governor and ally Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, contributing to Purnama's defeat and subsequent trial and conviction for alleged religious blasphemy (Mietzner, 2018: 272-275). In the aftermath of the rallies, Jokowi has been increasingly solicitous toward NU compared to other Islamic groups – for instance by speaking positively about *Islam Nusantara* as an ideology that is compatible with Indonesia's national ideology in his various appearances in NU-related gatherings (Hamdani, 2019).

Most importantly, Jokowi has given substantial support to NU's promotion of *Islam Nusantara* internationally. *Islam Nusantara* has been adopted by the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and promoted via official diplomatic channels throughout the world as a tool of Indonesia's "soft power diplomacy" (Saiman, 2019). The ministry brought senior NU leaders to sponsored conferences and seminars promoting religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue overseas. In addition, Indonesian security agencies such as the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) have adopted *Islam Nusantara* as part of their strategy to promote 'moderate Islam' to counter more 'radical' Islamic groups. The agency has supported international conferences and seminars where speakers from NU promoted *Islam Nusantara* as an antidote to radicalism and extremism (Mandaville and Hamid, 2018: 25).

After aligning the NU closer to Jokowi, Said Aqil and other moderate NU leaders are becoming bolder in attacking their opponents, both within and outside of the organization. In addition to labeling his critics as 'Wahhabis,' NU chairman Said Aqil began to demand that NU should be in charge of all mosques and other Islamic institutions in Indonesia, in order to safeguard the country from conservative Islamist interpretation. In a January 27, 2019 speech, he declared that "all mosque prayer leaders (*imams*), preachers, judges (*qadi*), and the Minister of Religious Affairs have to come from NU. Otherwise, they may lead the faithful astray" (Nuary, 2019). Such remarks drew strong reactions from Muhammadiyah leaders, one of whom declared that Said Aqil's declaration is "a dangerous statement that might endanger Indonesia's national unity" (Atriana, 2019). These are troubling signs that NU has embraced exclusivist pluralist strategies to deal with ideological challenges from conservative opponents, which heightens sectarian divide between itself and other Indonesian Islamic organizations, including with Muhammadiyah.

NU's effort to counter radicalism and promote moderation through Islam Nusantara is also achieved by its closer alliance with the Indonesian state. Its

efforts have received a strong endorsement and support from ruling regime of President Joko Widodo (commonly known as 'Jokowi'). This is because president increasingly comes under pressure from the conservative Islamist groups, especially after the 2016/17 Defending Islam rallies that resulted in the re-election defeat of his ally, former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama. The clearest sign of Jokowi's favor towards NU was his selection of Ma'ruf Amin – the organization's supreme leader (*rais aam*), to become his vice-presidential nominee on the eve of his presidential re-election campaign in 2019. This was done despite the fact Amin's theological viewpoints closely resembles those from more conservative NU factions. As former chairman of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) – Amin was responsible for the issuance of numerous fatwas against a minorities such as Ahmadis and LGBTQs, along with the ruling against former governor Purnama that declared him to have committed religious blasphemy, justifying the action of the Defending Islam supporters (Fealy, 2018b).

NU's alliance with the Jokowi regime has emboldened it to take tough – sometimes violent measures – to disrupt its Islamist opponents and exclude them from the public sphere. For instance, *Banser*, a militia group affiliated by Ansor – the organization's youth wing – has frequently disrupted HTI-sponsored gatherings and forcefully disbanded *da'wa* activities conducted by popular Islamist preachers such as Felix Siauw - who is considered to have close ties with HTI (Burhani, 2018: 18). Ansor's tactics to disrupt peaceful mobilization activities sponsored by HTI and Islamist organizations like FPI, has been criticized by human rights activists, including those affiliated with NU. One activist called this tactic "echoes the strategies adapted by the Indonesian Army to disrupt the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) activities during the mid-1960s" before it launched a massacre against PKI members and activists in 1965 and 1966.[17]

[17] Interview with Aan Anshori, a human rights activist affiliated with NU, Surabaya, February 4th, 2020.

Even peaceful social movements like *#2019ChangePresident* (#2019GantiPresiden), which happened to have many members from the ranks of Alumni 212 and other conservative Islamist groups, were often harassed by the authorities and have their rallies often forcefully disbanded by security officials just before the 2019 presidential campaign season started (Warburton and Aspinall, 2019). *NU Garis Lurus* website – where it propagated its views - went offline after 2018 – allegedly because it was shut down by the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information (Iqbal 2021). Abdul Somad – the most prominent preacher affiliated with *NU Garis Lurus* - has been banned from speaking in several state universities and other public institutions (Hadi, 2019). The initiative to limit Somad's preaching activities seems to come from senior NU leaders whom have accused him to harbor sympathies to the now banned HTI, while also have concerns regarding his ambitions for a future leadership position in NU (Arbuckle-Gultom & Sirait, 2019).

Due to the increasing state-led persecutions against conservative Islamist groups and activists - often backed by NU and its affiliates like Ansor - growing number of Indonesian scholars are calling Ansor's actions to be no different from those practiced by its self-proclaimed nemesis – FPI – in "threatening those who have different religious ideas by halting and disbanding their activities" (Burhani 2018: 18). Both NU and Ansor's actions against conservative Islamist groups – emboldened by their alliance with the Jokowi regime - has clearly helped to promote further sectarian divisions between the contending groups that further led NU to embrace a exclusivist pluralist direction in the past few years.

Jokowi managed to win his 2019 rematch against Prabowo and accordingly, NU has been rewarded by the regime with the appointment its supreme leader Ma'ruf Amin as his new Vice President of four of its cadres as ministers in the new cabinet. In the latest cabinet reshuffle conducted in December 2020, Ansor Chairman Yaqut Cholil Qomas was appointed as Ministry of Religious Affairs – a position long coveted by the NU leadership and

its activists. However, some observers within the NU have begun to question whether the organization has grown too close to the Jokowi regime. A junior NU scholar has questioned whether the close relationship between NU and its leaders and the Jokowi regime has led the organization to become:

> *….a little more than government-sanctioned 'loudspeakers' to justify any policies made by the president. To be a 'progressive Islam' has become a little more than backing the Jokowi-Ma'ruf regime in its totality….Gradually, 'progressive Islam' [within NU] has evolved to become 'statist Islam.' (Fitriyah, 2019).*

To conclude, NU's promotion of *Islam Nusantara* and close alliance with the Jokowi regime has lead it to embrace exclusivist moderation – where the rhetoric of NU leaders praising moderate norms like democracy and tolerance is increasingly contradicted by the actions of its activists who attack conservative NU clerics and other Islamic groups with differing theological interpretations – both conservative Islamists like HTI and 'deviant' minorities such as Ahmadi and Shi'a Muslims. Such rhetoric is also contradicted by the action of its leaders in support of the Jokowi regime's effort to rollback democratic institutions – as seen in their support for the restoration of the indirect presidential election system that was highlighted in the introduction to this article.

Conclusion

Why and under which socio-political conditions do a religious organization that has adhered to follow moderate political norms and discourses decide to backtrack from them and decide to pursue policies to embrace an exclusivist moderation, especially toward their ideological rivals? This article seeks to find the answer to this puzzle by examining the Nahdlatul Ulama's case. It analyzes the internal dynamics faced by a religious organization driven by an increasingly open religious marketplace and detailed how increasing competition and declining religious authority have lead the NU to backtrack from its commitment toward moderate norms that were originally initiated during the Abdurrahman Wahid chairmanship. Instead, the organization is increasingly pursuing exclusivist and illiberal policies to exclude its ideological competitors out of the public sphere, both on its own accord and in alliance with the state.

The main factors which explains the changing level of commitment to political moderation within the NU case is the increasing competition of the Islamic religious marketplace and the fragmentation of religious authority faced by the NU starting after the Reformasi era but is particularly troublesome for the organization within the past decade. This competition and authority breakdown did not occur during Abdurrahman Wahid's leadership – under which he was able to propagate moderate norms to upheld democracy and pluralism by utilizing a combination of charismatic leadership and alliance with the Suharto regime (until appx. 1990). At the same time, Wahid framed himself as a moderate Islamic leader who extolled pluralist and democratic values both within the NU and the Indonesian public space throughout his NU chairmanship. He was able to consistently promote these norms while also prevailed over ideological challenges put forward by conservative Islamist rivals both within NU and externally as well. Wahid and Nurcolish Madjid – his modernist counterpart – became influential authority figures who promoted moderate norms within constrained religious marketplace in Indonesia, then dominated by NU and Muhammadiyah – in a

time where the marketplace was closed to conservative Islamist groups which faced severe reprisals from the Suharto regime and could only conducted their activities underground.

However, Wahid failed to prepare and implement a succession plan to succeed him in the NU leadership and to become standard bearers to promote these moderate norms, once he resigned his NU chairmanship to become Indonesia's first democratically elected president in 1999. This failure to prepare the next generation of NU activists with potential to be future leaders of the organization has negative consequences for the prospect of moderation within the NU later on, as Indonesia's religious marketplace was opened and quickly became competitive after the 1998 *Reformasi.* As a result, NU is increasingly losing authority to more conservative Islamist groups and preachers. Said Aqil and the NU leadership are facing a very competitive religious marketplace characterized by the influx of conservative Islamist organizations, alongside the emergence of conservative clerics within NU's own ranks, like those who affiliated with *NU Garis Lurus* as well as Abdul Somad, who despite not being formally affiliated with the former is considered enough of a threat to the NU leadership that the organization supports the efforts to restrict his proselytization activities.

To counter these Islamist-leaning groups and preachers NU leadership are promoting the *Islam Nusantara* ideology, aligning the organization more closely to the Jokowi regime and lending their support to his initiative to combat 'radical' and 'extremist' Islamist ideas allegedly supported by conservative Islamist groups. In addition, both unilaterally and in coordination with the regime, its activists launched strategic assaults and persecutions against its ideological rivals to marginalize and exclude these religious competitors from Indonesia's public space. As a result, NU managed to become Jokowi's main Islamic political ally. However, this alliance comes at a high price as the organization increasingly backtracks from its commitment toward the democratic norms it vows to support.

This article contributes to further the insights of the inclusion-moderation thesis by showing a pathway to explain internal dynamics within the organization, in which a religious organization might backtrack from its commitment to promote moderate norms after democracy has been attained. Utilizing the 'marketplace of ideas' framework to fill a theoretical gap of the thesis, it shows that a religious group's declining commitment to democratic and pluralistic norms is a reaction for its decreasing membership and authority due to growing ideological competition from conservative Islamist organizations and clerics. I conclude that genuine support toward these norms, even in Muslim democracies – is not constant and can change due to changing political climate of the country. Since moderate Islamic organizations like NU have in the past serve as critical voices which provided a 'check and balance' role towards the Indonesian state – its current alliance with the Jokowi regime poses a risk that it might abandon this crucial role to assure the institutionalization of democracy and pluralism in the largest Muslim-majority nation of the world.

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INDONESIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN CREATING SECURITY STABILITY IN INDO-PACIFIC REGION

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Abstract

Indonesia as one of the countries that is included in the Indo-Pacific Region has an important role in creating security stability in the Region. As the center point of the Indo-Pacific, Indonesia certainly thinks about the right defense strategy to be able to play an active role in the region. Undoubtedly, this action will be related to Indonesia's free-and-active foreign policy. As a region that has strategic points, countries in the Indo-Pacific Region carry out an agenda to be able to solve problems in a peaceful way by increasing mutual trust. Naturally, it will make the Indo-Pacific Region as a central region in the future. Based on the findings, Indonesia's foreign policy takes part in an active role at the international level by promoting the concept of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region to increase mutual trust between countries. In addition, countries in the region participate in mutually beneficial openness in order to create security stability in the region. Indonesia's foreign policy is considered to be appropriate and useful in the midst of situations in competing for having influence in the region. Thus, Indonesia's role in the Indo-Pacific cannot be separated from the character of Indonesia's current foreign policy which emphasizes "middle power" and leadership in the region.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Security Stability, Indo-Pacific.

Preface

The development of science and technology is one of the things that are used by the state to be able to grow and develop in creating various kinds of defense tools and technology. It can be seen from the security dynamics that are always experiencing developments both at the regional and global levels, such as China, South Korea and Japan which concern in increasing their military capabilities, so this action will attract other countries to participate in making these improvements.

At this time, the Indo-Pacific is a region that is highly discussed by several major countries in the world. It is because this area connects two oceans, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, which make the Indo-Pacific a strategic and interesting to be explored further. Moreover, Indonesia as the focal point in the relationship between the two oceans must have an active role in the region. As the coordinating center for the Indo-Pacific, Indonesia certainly has to implement an appropriate foreign policy so that it can become one of the main references in mobilizing other countries which have roles in the region.

Based on the research, Indonesia must be able to position itself and always be aware in maintaining its position, especially as a non-aligned force (Yanuarti et al, 2020: 43). The Indo-Pacific Region is a wider region because it is not only covering Asia Pacific countries, but it is also connecting Asian countries to Africa as the calculated Region. Thus, this dynamic is something that must be done and taken into account by Indonesia considering Indonesia is the center of the Indo-Pacific which makes Indonesia need to adjust its foreign policy in order to play an active role in creating regional security stability.

One of the reasons of the Indo-Pacific region has become the center of attention is because the activities such as security, trade and the environment are also being conducted by many countries (Passarelli, 2014). This is also related because the Indo-Pacific Region is an international trade route traversed by major countries such as the United States, China and other countries, so it does not rule out the possibility of spreading influence in the region. This situation has become problems that must be studied to be able to see the coordination and growth of regional security in the future.

Regarding these problems, Indonesia must take the initiative to maintain security stability in the Indo-Pacific Region considering that this area is a traffic lane for major countries in carrying out economic, political, and military activities. The growth of a large country, such as China, has forced Indonesia to play an important role in the region. This is correlated to the purpose of this study

which is to analyze Indonesia's foreign policy in creating security stability in the Indo-Pacific Region.

Discussion

Security Stability in the Indo-Pacific Region

The development of this strategic environment will certainly determine the next steps both in the regional and global scope. This security development will have an impact on the interaction of the surrounding countries, as in the Pacific Region there are great powers competing for their interests. This problem will certainly have an impact on security stability in the Region and will cause various losses resulting from the competition. The competition between the two great powers, the United States and China, is a case that can be seen on this issue, which will potentially not only threaten stability, but it will also become a competition for other countries to make their country have a greater power.

One of the important factors in carrying out the life of the country is to survive or to maintain the stability of the country's security and its region to be able to survive in various kinds of global powers. The Indo-Pacific is a strategic area because it involves the future of countries in the world, where there are copious interests in the region so that many countries compete to achieve their interests. Indo-Pacific security becomes the future of the countries in its area as well as countries with an interest in it. This situation has made the security in the Indo-Pacific as a great barometer of global stability, considering the amount of attention which focused on this Region. It is proven by the two great powers that play each other's roles, making other countries around this area into the game, including Indonesia.

Indonesia as the Central Point of the Indo-Pacific

The shift that occurred from the Asia Pacific Region to the Indo-Pacific Region is a substantial study in the current era. This situation has made Indonesia and the countries within the Region have more duties and roles in realizing security stability in the Region. Moreover, the threats that occur will certainly exist so that the countries involved must form the spirit and enthusiasm to be able to foster mutual trust between countries in the Region. Indonesia as the center point of the Indo-Pacific has become, indeed, a positive and negative perspective in the realm of International Relations. As the center point of the Indo-Pacific, Indonesia must be able to become a pillar of economic development globally (Yanuarti et al, 2020: 44). On the other hand, if Indonesia cannot take advantage of this momentum, it will become a boomerang for Indonesia as the focal point in the region.

Based on the Ministerial Meeting at the East Asia Summit held on August 9, 2018 attended by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Retno Marsudi explained that Indonesia took the initiative to be able to play an active role in the Indo-Pacific which became a new potential. This action aims to increase cooperation in order to encourage and to anticipate threats that will occur in the future. Implicitly, Indonesia is a country that has not been able to control the existing great powers so that Indonesia must be able to influence and to shape the countries involved in the region to be united on the basis of enhancing trust between one another.

The development done by Indonesia in achieving its interests cannot be separated from Indonesia's foreign policies: free and active, which makes Indonesia have to strengthen security stability in the Indo-Pacific Region. In addition, the vision to make Indonesia as the 'World Maritime Axis' has become the country's development that was proclaimed long before the declaration of Indo-Pacific Region. Based on this foreign policy, Indonesia continues to advocate the principle of being open and transparent to build high level of mutual trust in this Region.

The Indo-Pacific's perspective that is being discussed will certainly be mutual interest not only for Indonesia, but also for other countries to cooperate in order to minimize potential threats, conflicts, and other disputes. As a country involved, Indonesia will certainly maintain its central position and remain firm in its national security so that Indonesia will not allow other countries to determine the final path for its interests.

Indonesia as one of the focal points will certainly be faced with problems that will come in the future, especially the issue of trust which is the greatest challenge today. It is clear that to solve this problem; Indonesia must express and improve the relationships with its surrounding countries by building good communication. Open communication will certainly create mutual trust between countries and can avoid distrust between countries. This is why the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Retno Marsudi, recommends the concept of Indo-Pacific cooperation to avoid conflicts and problems that will occur, especially mutual trust issue between the countries of the region. This problem cannot be underestimated because it can create harmonious relationship in the future by having strong fundamental.

Indonesia's Foreign Policy in Responding to Competition in the Indo-Pacific Region

Foreign policy is one of the plans that can relate to various other factors outside the country's borders. Making a design in the form of a foreign policy can be one of the interests to determine the achievements that can be made, so internal and external factors will influence each other. To be able to determine foreign policy, this will obviously be in line with the foreign policy that has been adopted by the country.

Indonesia has a free and active foreign policy so that Indonesia takes an active role in creating the characteristics of the nation. This is one of Indonesia's efforts and even strategies to be able to build relationships in the form of

cooperation with others. Indonesia must take the advantage of this momentum in the Indo-Pacific region which has become a hot discussion topic in the world, so Indonesia can play an active role and provide the right strategy in carrying out its policies. Therefore, by implementing this foreign policy, Indonesia will be expected to continue to participate and play an active role in performing good leadership both domestically and regionally.

Further studies have shown that Indonesia's foreign policy in the era of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) government has an internationalist character so that Indonesia is considered to have a higher level of existence on the international stage. It is because the active role that SBY continues to do in maintaining Indonesia's existence in the world. This can be seen from the principle done by SBY, namely "million friends zero enemy" which makes Indonesia a neutral country but plays an active role in carrying out relations with other countries. This action was done by SBY to rebuild Indonesia's image, especially in the Southeast Asia Region by playing an active role in bilateral and multilateral cooperation platforms.

After the end of SBY's leadership, the direction of Indonesia's foreign policy underwent a shift. It was started by having an internationalist character, but the current foreign policy starts reducing Indonesia's activities in the international world in order to improve and strengthen the domestic politics. During the reign of Joko Widodo, Indonesia is more inward-oriented, so the policy directions issued are more towards the economy and infrastructure development. Nevertheless, Jokowi carries "middle power diplomacy" in his strategy in dealing with global issues and problems which occur nowadays (Sudira, 2019: 5). Jokowi prioritizes Indonesia to be a regional power that is actively involved in global engagement, but it still aims to domestic interests (Connelly, 2014).

Even though Indonesia has an inward-oriented foreign policy, it does not stop Indonesia from becoming a leader in the region. This is in accordance with

Indonesia's priority in making the policy directions that do not only discuss in the economic field, but also in the military, in the socio-cultural and in the bureaucracy as the main interest in achieving its goals (Yohanes, 2017). The Indo-Pacific needs courageous and strong leadership to bring this "way". This is an opportunity for Indonesia to be able to bring countries involved to play an active role and to accomplish the dreams in Indo-Pacific region.

Indonesia in carrying out its foreign policy currently sees the potential that exists in the external of the country. It can be seen from the Indonesian's defense principle which is active defensive: Indonesia participates in carrying out and sees the potential that exists in the region in order to participate in realizing security stability as one of the country in the region with good infrastructures in the future. This is one of Indonesia's spirits in trying to foster mutual trust between countries in the Indo-Pacific region. By creating the mutual trust, it is hoped that it can anticipate and overcome various problems that exist in the area.

The action can be proven by the concept of Indo-Pacific cooperation carried out by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Retno Marsudi, that in ensuring security stability in the Indo-Pacific region, Indonesia carries out peace, stability and prosperity stated in ASEAN as one of the regions that is having the principle of freedom and a zone of peace for the whole country. By building this framework, the Indo-Pacific becomes an open area which emphasizes cooperation in every existing problem.

Based on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific at the 34th Summit in 2019, Indonesia has realized that the Indo-Pacific region has great potential so that major powers will compete in gaining the influence in the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2018). By looking at this challenge, Indonesia needs to maintain and achieve security stability in the region in order to avoid and minimize the great powers in this region. At this summit, Indonesia emphasized that countries in the region must contribute to unite and

achieve mutual peace, especially in creating good cooperation in increasing mutual trust.

The concept of this cooperation as a form of Indonesia's foreign policy is a reference to always improve cooperation in the maritime sector and to build sustainable synergy. This action can be an opportunity for Indonesia to become one of the countries that encourage and break the strengthening process in the Indo-Pacific region. The concept of this cooperation is certainly inseparable from Indonesia's foreign policy and is in line with Indonesia's vision and mission as the World Maritime Axis. Thus, Indonesia does not only respond to the great powers in the Indo-Pacific region, but also contributes to the formation of a peaceful and harmonious region for the common good.

Creating an increasingly active Indo-Pacific region certainly brings Indonesia the opportunity to be able to play its role on the international stage. As a result, it does not only carries the name of Indonesia to promote security stability in the region, but it also becomes one of Indonesia's consistency in being able to answer the challenges that are currently being discussed in the international world. The cooperation opportunity launched by Indonesia will certainly be a chance as well as a challenge for Indonesia that should be considered further. Strengthening infrastructure in this region will be a good mechanism to continue build a region that has a good habit of dialogue so that trust between countries can be created.

Indonesia must work hard to encourage the country in this strategic dynamic to produce good results. Indonesia's struggle in the Indo-Pacific region can be seen from the results of the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) in Thailand on March 9, 2019 that summarized 4 (four) collaborations in the Outlook in the Indo-Pacific: strengthening maritime cooperation, mutual connectivity, UN SDGs 2030, and cooperation in the economy and other fields (Acharya, 2019). Hence, those points become the basis for Indonesia in the role of building cooperation actively, especially to realize international cooperation in the

maritime field which in accordance with Indonesia's principle in unity and Indonesia's free and active foreign policy in prioritizing the values of interests.

According to Retno Marsudi, the framework of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is certainly in line with Indonesia's goals as the World Maritime Axis so that this is the right momentum to be inclusive and transparent with the vision and mission of the Indonesian Maritime Axis (Purwanto, 2018). Indonesia and ASEAN will certainly have a role in determining the future of the Indo-Pacific region to remain safe and peaceful for the future of the region (Humas, 2018). This is in line with the Indonesian Government who wants to build glory through maritime field. Although the dynamics in the strategic environment cannot be denied, Indonesia remains optimistic in focusing on to every movement and step to build a comprehensive strategy to create security stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Indonesia must look at the projections of the major powers that exist in the Indo-Pacific region. By looking at this projection, of course, Indonesia can maintain its credibility as a country as well as a leader in the region. It is hoped that Indonesia will continue to strive to promote good cooperation to maintain stability and peace which is one of the requirements to be able to build a good region in the future. This finding is one of the considerations that Indonesia is not only connected and focuses on cooperation, but Indonesia also participates in implementing and integrating elements of good regional planning for the future. As one of the countries that prioritize and support cooperation and national security by formulating policies and strategies, Indonesia will point up more on defense and peace. It is applied to the Indo-Pacific region which becomes the world's attention, so Indonesia will always focus on strategy in its foreign policy.

The future of the Indo-Pacific is the responsibility of the countries involved in determining the region so that cooperation is one form that must be implemented to achieve common interests. To become a prosperous region which prioritizes peace, good synergy and mutual support are needed -especially in

achieving security stability. It is necessary to achieve solid control, and a country's foreign policy has an important role in determining the future of the Indo-Pacific region. This foreign policy is one of the solutions as well as the answers to current and future problems so that gradually it will focus on the countries involved.

Therefore, Indonesia does not only see opportunities from the Indo-Pacific region, but it also sees that the Indo-Pacific region will become a battle as well as a competition field for big countries to expand their influence; subsequently, the real threats in the Indo-Pacific region will not be avoided. This type of problem can be seen from dynamic real threats such as piracy, illegal fishing, smuggling and cyber-crime which is one of the threats to regional security instability (Tertia et al, 2018). In addition, the spread of influence from major powers such as the United States and China is one of the reasons for Indonesia to adapt the concept of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region so that it will become Indonesia's long-term plan in preventing the growth of major powers in the region. This threat must be anticipated together with countries in the region, so these issues and problems will become a shared responsibility.

Closing

Indonesia's foreign policy is one of the plans as well as solutions to be able to answer the problems that exist in the region. Having active involvement in various international activities, it becomes a strategy for Indonesia to be able to create security stability, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. Through its role, it can be seen that Indonesia has seriousness in responding to the challenges being faced through the formation of maritime cooperation concept which is expected to answer threats as well as challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. Hence, Indonesia will not only carry out its oriented foreign policy, but Indonesia will also maintain its existence in the international community in responding to the existing challenges. It is done by Indonesia considering that the Indo-Pacific region will

be an area that has great potential in the future and will be the joint responsibility of the countries involved in it.

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