
Comparative Foreign Policies Of Indonesia And The Philippines In Responding To Security Instability To Tiongkok

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the formulation of Indonesian and Philippines' foreign policies in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite the similar characteristics as archipelagic states, they adopt distinct foreign policy approaches. Employing a qualitative comparative case study method, this research draws on primary data from interviews and observations, as well as secondary data from relevant literature. Data were analyzed through tracking and triangulation techniques. The findings reveal that Indonesia adopts a predominantly diplomatic approach in its Indo-Pacific strategy, whereas the Philippines employs a combination of hard power and legal instruments, particularly through international judicial mechanisms. These differences are rooted in each country's distinct geopolitical posture—Indonesia maintaining a closer orientation toward China, and the Philippines aligning more closely with the United States.

Keywords: *Foreign Policy, Indo-Pacific, Indonesia, Philippines, Comparative Study*

INTRODUCTION

The Indo-Pacific region holds significant strategic importance in economic, political, and military dimensions. It has increasingly become the focal point of complex geopolitical interactions involving numerous state actors. This region serves as a central axis for geographical, political, and strategic interests of key powers, including the United States, Japan, India, and Australia (Pedrason, 2021). The Indo-Pacific's economic potential, coupled with its geopolitical salience and evolving security dynamics, has prompted various

countries to formulate and implement strategies aimed at safeguarding and advancing their respective national interests.

From an economic perspective, the development and strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region has attracted global attention, particularly from the United States, which prioritized the region in its foreign policy agenda during the Trump administration. This shift was formally articulated in key documents such as the *National Security Strategy* (2017) and the *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (2019), both of which emphasized the Indo-Pacific as a

central arena for geopolitical and economic engagement (White House, 2017; U.S. Department of Defense, 2019). The United States views the Indo-Pacific as a form of geopolitical transformation that plays an essential role in economic, political, and security development. Economically, the Indo-Pacific region is characterized by its vast maritime space and the importance of maritime connectivity for trade and economic activities. Stability and security of the maritime domain are essential to ensure the smooth flow of goods and resources. Countries in the region have a shared interest in maintaining open and secure sea lanes for trade and investment (Nainggolan & Pedrason, 2021).

The Indo-Pacific region encompasses major economic powers such as China, India, Japan, and Australia, all of which play pivotal roles in global trade and investment. Its substantial economic potential and sustained growth have garnered widespread international interest, prompting the establishment of strategic economic initiatives and partnerships, including China's Belt and Road Initiative and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision (Pedrason, 2021). Furthermore, the region functions as a critical nexus of global trade, underpinned by strategic maritime passageways essential for the transit of goods and natural resources. It is rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, minerals, and fisheries, making it an essential region for energy security and

economic development (Joyce et al., 2021).

From a political perspective, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a central issue in contemporary international relations. The region is politically defined by a complex web of relationships, strategic alignments, and rivalries among both major and middle powers. It encompasses not only global actors such as the United States, China, India, and Japan but also small and medium-sized states—including ASEAN member countries—that play a pivotal role in shaping the regional political landscape. The Indo-Pacific's political significance is underscored by key issues such as territorial disputes, maritime security challenges, and the ongoing recalibration of power balances among major actors. The Indo-Pacific also reflects the broader effort to construct a regional security architecture centered on maritime governance and connectivity. Its vast geographical expanse, coupled with the strategic value of its sea lines of communication, necessitates cooperative frameworks to ensure regional peace and security. Political contestation in the region is driven not only by competing territorial claims but also by divergent visions of regional order and influence. As Joyce et al. (2021) note, the Indo-Pacific is marked by overlapping geopolitical interests and strategic rivalries that shape diplomatic engagements and regional alignments. In this context, the Indo-Pacific is not merely a geographical concept but a political

construct, reflecting the ambitions of state actors to assert influence and shape the future of regional order.

The Indo-Pacific region has witnessed increasing competition and power dynamics among these countries, leading to the formulation of various strategies and policies to protect and advance their political interests. It includes the Indo-Pacific strategies of countries such as the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, which aim to promote a free, open, and rules-based order (Putro, 2021). The United States views the Indo-Pacific region as necessary to its economic, security, and political interests. With access to the region, the US can protect and advance its interests (Putro, 2021).

In the military domain, the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a focal point for strategic cooperation and power projection among key global actors. One notable example is the AUKUS security pact; Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which reflect efforts to enhance military capabilities and uphold regional stability, particularly through initiatives such as the development of nuclear-powered submarines. The region hosts several major military powers, including the United States, China, India, and Japan, all of which possess substantial military assets and strategic interests. As maritime security plays a critical role in Indo-Pacific military strategies, countries have increasingly invested in naval infrastructure and capabilities to secure

sea lanes and assert regional influence. Alongside traditional power rivalries, the region also grapples with non-traditional security threats such as maritime piracy, terrorism, and territorial disputes, further complicating the regional security environment (Pedrason, 2021). Military modernization and strategic competition—particularly between the United States and China—have intensified, marked by frequent naval exercises, arms development, and the establishment of new defense alliances. These dynamics underscore the Indo-Pacific's strategic significance and the growing complexity of its security landscape (Joyce et al., 2021).

The Indo-Pacific region is characterized by various security conflicts that significantly affect regional stability and global security. One of the most prominent is the territorial dispute in the South China Sea, where overlapping claims—particularly by China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei—have escalated tensions and led to military confrontations, coercive diplomacy, and the militarization of contested maritime features. China's large-scale land reclamation and construction of artificial islands equipped with military facilities have raised serious concerns among regional states and external powers. These actions have increased the risk of armed conflict due to potential miscalculations at sea and have drawn responses from external actors such as the United States through freedom of navigation operations

(FONOPs), thereby expanding the dispute into a broader regional security concern (Storey, 2017; Kaplan, 2014). Furthermore, these developments challenge the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), particularly with regard to exclusive economic zones and maritime entitlements (Batongbacal, 2016).

Security tensions in the Indo-Pacific are shaped by several factors, among which the South China Sea territorial dispute remains one of the most pressing threats to regional stability. China's extensive territorial claims and construction of artificial islands in the disputed waters have raised tensions with neighboring countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The North Korean nuclear issue is another security conflict in the Indo-Pacific region. North Korea's efforts to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missile capabilities have raised concerns among neighboring countries and the international community. These activities have led to rising tensions and the imposition of sanctions and diplomatic efforts to address the issue. Tensions on the Korean Peninsula can potentially escalate into a major military conflict with devastating consequences (Scott, 2019).

The Indo-Pacific region is marked by complex security dynamics, ranging from terrorism and maritime threats to unresolved territorial disputes. For archipelagic states like Indonesia and the Philippines, these challenges are

especially pressing due to their geographic positioning along vital sea lanes. Both countries have responded with a mix of domestic security strategies and regional cooperation mechanisms, including joint patrols, counterterrorism operations, and participation in ASEAN-led frameworks. However, beyond these practical measures, their foreign policy orientations in the Indo-Pacific differ significantly. This paper argues that while Indonesia adopts a diplomatic and multilateral approach rooted in ASEAN centrality and strategic autonomy, the Philippines employs a more assertive and security-driven strategy, closely aligned with traditional allies like the United States. This divergence is shaped by each country's geopolitical posture, historical alignments, and threat perceptions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Philippines' foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region emphasizes an independent and pragmatic approach aimed at maintaining good relations with major powers, including China. This policy is grounded in the principle of *"Development is Peace, and Peace is Development,"* which highlights the importance of economic cooperation and expanding diplomatic relations (Joyce et al., 2021). With regard to the South China Sea issue, the Philippines has adopted a balancing strategy, attempting to navigate its alliances with both the United States and China. This includes engaging in bilateral

talks with China to address overlapping maritime claims in the West Philippine Sea and explore joint resource development, while also maintaining close defense cooperation with the United States (Joyce et al., 2021). Additionally, the Philippines works to sustain cooperative ties with other ASEAN claimant states to prevent the dispute from escalating or damaging broader regional relationships.

Philippine foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific has experienced notable shifts under President Duterte. Observed from a clear departure from the previous administration's pro-Western posture, highlighting Duterte's adoption of a more independent and assertive stance (Magcamit, 2020; Gill, 2020). Gill argues that Duterte's administration initiated a strategic move toward "less America, more China" by reducing emphasis on the U.S. security alliance and strengthening economic and diplomatic ties with China.

Under President Duterte, the Philippines has been very vocal in criticizing the United States and the European Union, accusing them of treating the country as a colony and representing the remnants of imperialism in Asia. This behavior contrasts with the security-maximizing approach usually adopted by small states. Under Duterte, Philippine foreign policy shifted toward accommodating China's interests, while distancing itself from U.S. strategic priorities. President Trump has downplayed his country's territorial disputes with China and sought closer

economic and political ties with China. It includes temporarily setting aside the 2016 Hague Tribunal Award on the West Philippine Sea, reaffirming the Philippines' territorial rights, and invalidating China's claims (Magcamit, 2020). Philippine foreign policy under Duterte is also characterized by a willingness to criticize major international organizations and their perceived hypocrisy, double standards, and inefficiency. It is a departure from the stance of strongly supporting the principles, norms, and rules promoted by these organizations. Overall, the Duterte administration's foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific leaned toward accommodating China's interests, while simultaneously distancing itself from the United States and questioning the Western-led international order.

During this period, the Philippines and Japan deepened their bilateral relations by institutionalizing two-plus-two dialogues between their defense and foreign ministers. Additionally, following the announcement of the Australia–UK–US (AUKUS) security pact in 2021, the Philippines became the first Southeast Asian nation to publicly voice its support. It shows the Philippines' inclination to diversify its Asian strategic partners and form new defense networks. Duterte's foreign policy approach allows the Philippines to increase its regional diplomatic connectivity (Gill, 2020).

With the election of President Marcos Jr. in 2022 has emphasized the importance of

maintaining a balanced approach in the Philippines' strategic equation. Marcos Jr. emphasized the significance of the United States and the treaty alliance in shaping the Philippines' foreign and security policy while emphasizing the continued development of relations with China to avoid exacerbating Southeast Asia's security architecture (Gill, 2020).

Overall, the Philippines' foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific seeks to manage the region's complex geopolitical dynamics and respond to emerging security concerns within its immediate surroundings. Its strategic location—serving as a gateway between the Western Pacific and broader Asia, and its closeness to critical sea lanes and maritime communication routes—enhances its geopolitical importance in the region. Overall, Philippine foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region under the Duterte administration is characterized by an emphasis on maintaining good relations with major powers, seeking economic cooperation, and balancing its relationship with the United States and China in the South China Sea dispute (Magcamit, 2020; Gill, 2020)

Research on Indonesia's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region has been explored by several scholars, such as Fathun Nashir (2021), who highlights Indonesia's diplomatic posture in maintaining ASEAN centrality. This research shows that there is a reorientation in Indonesia's foreign policy. It is based on the Indo-Pacific Region, a new regional

region that promises maritime, political, and economic interests. Indonesia's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific Region tends to act as a country with middle power status. Middle-power countries consistently adopt diplomatic strategies to shape and guide their foreign policy. This also aligns with the constitutional mandate in Law/37/1999. Indonesia always acts as a catalyst, facilitator, and manager in building international relations in the Indo-Pacific Region. This reorientation makes Indonesia's foreign policy an ASEAN policy characterized by the emergence of seriousness by building the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific Cooperation.

Indonesia's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region continues to prioritize diplomatic engagement and multilateralism (Gideon, 2023). This approach reflects Indonesia's strategic commitment to maintaining ASEAN centrality and neutrality amid rising tensions between major powers such as China and the United States. Gideon highlights that Indonesia applies a poliheuristic decision-making model, which accounts for both rational (cost-benefit) considerations and psychological or cognitive factors—such as Indonesia's historical ties and its perception of regional leadership.

Looking at the broader geopolitical context of the Indo-Pacific, particularly the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, has directly affected regional dynamics and security policy (Souza, et al, 2022). Their study outlines competing claims from

Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, China, and the Philippines over the Spratly and Paracel Islands, highlighting the complex and overlapping assertions of sovereignty. For example, while Vietnam and Malaysia have submitted claims based on maritime law under UNCLOS, China relies on historical narratives to justify its Nine-Dash Line. The Philippines, on the other hand, has pursued legal arbitration and multilateral diplomacy to assert its claims, including its case at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016.

These findings underscore the contrast between Indonesia's cautious diplomatic balancing and the Philippines' legalistic and assertive approach in managing Indo-Pacific conflicts. This divergence reflects each country's geopolitical posture, security priorities, and strategic partnerships in the region. Indonesia's foreign policy emphasizes ASEAN centrality, non-alignment, and strategic ambiguity (Nashir, 2021), while the Philippines tends to rely on legal arbitration and deepen security cooperation with the United States, especially in response to maritime disputes (Magcamit, 2020; De Castro, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using a qualitative methodology with a comparative case study approach, which is commonly used to analyze similarities and differences across specific contexts (Yin, 2018). The comparison is based on the premise that

two different actors—Indonesia and the Philippines—exhibit similar responses to China's assertiveness in the South China Sea. Both countries have protested through ASEAN and other international mechanisms in defense of their maritime sovereignty. This study employs primary data obtained through interviews with representatives from the Indonesian Consulate in Manila, the Philippine Representative at the ASEAN Secretariat, and the Director of ASEAN Political Economy. Secondary data are drawn from scholarly books, academic journals, online databases, and official documents. Data analysis was carried out using triangulation and process tracing techniques to ensure reliability and validity (Patton, 2002; George & Bennett, 2005). Data collection took place in Jakarta.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Indonesia's Foreign Policy

Response in the Indo-Pacific Region

According to Dr. Siswo Pramono, then serving as Director-General of the Policy Analysis and Development Agency (BPPK) at Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a May 5, 2021 interview with the Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia, the Indo-Pacific reflects the Asian Century phenomenon. He noted that, unlike the American and European centuries, the Asian Century is marked by fragility—particularly vulnerable to regional divisions and power contestations (Pramono, 2021).

Agreeing with Siswo, Heiduk sees that the current shift from the American-European region to Asia has also expanded the variety of interests of various countries in the Indo-Pacific region and non-region in order to participate in the arena (Heiduk & Wacker, 2020). Fragility, the emergence of various actors and interests, and the widening geopolitical and geostrategic influence push the Indo-Pacific to become a new land of global attention.

On its way, the concept owned by ASEAN through the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) initiated by Indonesia as a key regional actor in 2019 demands inclusiveness, cooperation, and respect for ASEAN centrality. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific was agreed upon in 2019 during the 34th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok, Thailand. The document's derivatives of the cooperation domain include maritime, connectivity, SDGs, and cooperation in other economic fields (ASEAN, 2019).

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (ASEAN, 2019) emphasizes four key areas of cooperation: maritime cooperation, connectivity, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and economic and other possible cooperation. Among these, maritime cooperation is particularly crucial given the Indo-Pacific's strategic geography and the persistence of maritime disputes. ASEAN's emphasis on maritime cooperation reflects its commitment to maintaining peace, stability, and freedom of navigation in the region—

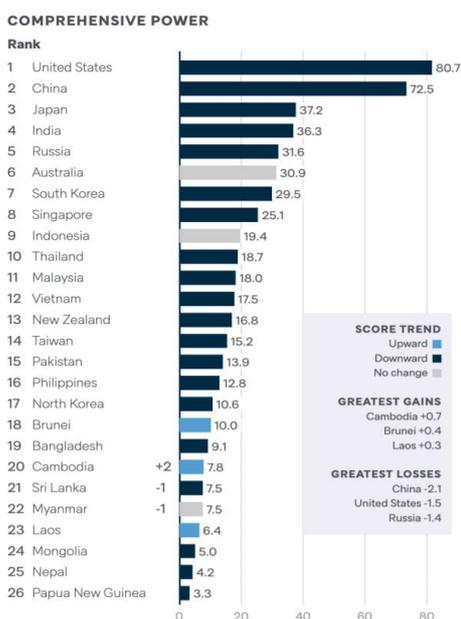
especially in sensitive areas such as the South China Sea. This focus underlines ASEAN's effort to promote a rules-based order and to serve as a neutral platform for dialogue among conflicting parties. The complexity of the South China Sea issue lies in the involvement of not only ASEAN claimant states but also major external powers, including the United States and its democratic allies. These powers often assert their presence under the banner of promoting a "free and open Indo-Pacific" and balancing China's assertiveness. Thus, ASEAN's cooperative approach in the maritime domain is both a diplomatic tool and a strategic response to prevent escalation and preserve regional autonomy.

Code	Policy	Component
A1	Indonesia Hard Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Move independently according to national interests (can make cooperation is multilateralism and bilateralism) b) Affirming the concept of free actors in the sense of independent (anti-annexation of territory)
A2	Indonesia soft power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Promote ASEAN centrality policy based on TAC and Bali Concord b) Cooperate through AAIOP and ARF to synergize diplomatically

Source: Researcher, 2023

The table above shows alternative foreign policy considerations that Indonesia must take to respond to China's aggressiveness in the region of Indo-Pacific, especially the North Natuna Sea theoretical area, which

belongs to Indonesia. This means that calculations using a hard power approach by creating open conflict must be calculated for profit and loss. It is, likewise, using soft power.



Rank	Country/Territory	Score	Trend	
1	United States	80.7	Downward	
2	China	72.5	Downward	
3	Japan	37.2	Downward	
4	India	36.3	Downward	
5	Russia	31.6	Downward	
6	Australia	30.9	No change	
7	South Korea	29.5	Downward	
8	Singapore	25.1	Downward	
9	Indonesia	19.4	Downward	
10	Thailand	18.7	Downward	
11	Malaysia	18.0	Downward	
12	Vietnam	17.5	Downward	
13	New Zealand	16.8	Downward	
14	Taiwan	15.2	Downward	
15	Pakistan	13.9	Downward	
16	Philippines	12.8	Downward	
17	North Korea	10.6	Downward	
18	Brunei*	10.0	Upward	
19	Bangladesh	9.1	Downward	
20	+2	Cambodia	7.8	Upward
21	-1	Sri Lanka	7.5	Downward
22	-1	Myanmar	7.5	Downward
23	Laos	6.4	Upward	
24	Mongolia	5.0	Downward	
25	Nepal	4.2	Downward	
26	Papua New Guinea	3.3	Downward	

Source: Lowy Institute , 2023

Based on the two figures above, it shows that the position of Indonesia and China are much different from the comprehensive level of power. Indonesia is in ninth place, while China is in second place. So, based on the accumulated power value, the categories of Indonesia and China are different. China became a Superpower country with 72 points, while Indonesia is in the Middle power status with 19 points. It means that from the difference in points alone, the two countries are very different / Thus, it is difficult for Indonesia to carry out hard power policies against China.

- a) The size of the accumulated order of state power above is measured based on fundamental economic capabilities, indicators like purchasing power parity, the country's influence on the global stage, level of technological development, and its integration into worldwide networks.
- b) Military capability, refers to conventional armed strength which is assessed through defense resources, military personnel and structure, weaponry and equipment, specialized abilities, and the strategic military stance within Asia.

- c) Resilience, a country's ability to withstand or prevent real or potential external threats to its stability, evaluated through factors such as institutional strength, resource security, geoeconomics and geopolitical stability, and nuclear deterrence.
- d) Future Resources: Projected future distribution of resources and capabilities, which play a role in current perceptions of strength; measured in terms of economic, defense, and broad resource forecasts by 2030, as well as working-age population and labor dividend forecasts for 2050.
- e) Economic Relations, refer to the ability to wield influence and leverage through mutual economic dependence, as reflected in trade partnerships, investment ties, and economic diplomacy efforts.
- f) Defense Networks, partnerships across Asia function as force multipliers for independent military capabilities, evaluated through the strength of alliances, regional defense diplomacy, and arms transfers.
- g) Diplomatic Influence, the level and standing of a country's foreign relations, measured in terms of diplomatic networks (Lowy Institute, 2023). Some of the variables above show a concrete measure of the state's ability in international relations. The author's analysis based on the political and security domains is the two most critical factors influencing interactions among countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

Indonesia's military strength is shown in the table below:

Key Indicators	Specific Indicators	Total Score of Special Indicators	Total Score of Key Indicators	Strength Score
Economy Capability	<i>GDP Size</i>	12.5	9.0	19.4
	<i>Intern Specificational Leverage</i>	1.0		
	<i>Technology</i>	7.1		
	<i>Connectivity</i>	8.7		
Military Capability	<i>Defence Spending</i>	2.0	14.8	
	<i>Armed Forces</i>	26.0		
	<i>Weapons & Platforms</i>	7.5		
	<i>Signature Capabilities</i>	14.5		
	<i>Asian Military Posture</i>	32.6		
Resilience	<i>Internal Stability</i>	48.1	36.8	
	<i>Resource Security</i>	58.1		
	<i>Geoeconomic Security</i>	84.8		
	<i>Geopolitical Security</i>	31.5		

	<i>Nuclear Deterrence</i>	0.0		
Economic Relationship	<i>Regional Trade Relations</i>	5.3	12.3	
	<i>Regional Investment Ties</i>	4.0		
	<i>Economic Diplomacy</i>	24.8		
Security Networking	<i>Regional Alliance Network</i>	0.0	29.6	
	<i>Regional Defence Diplomacy</i>	29.6		
	<i>Global Defence Partnerships</i>	2.2		
Diplomacy Influence	<i>Diplomatic Network</i>	60.4	54	
	<i>Multilateral Power</i>	45.9		
	<i>Foreign Policy</i>	41.1		
Cultural Influence	<i>Cultural Projection</i>	11.9	15.9	
	<i>Information Flows</i>	2.4		
	<i>People Exchanges</i>	25.9		
Future Resources	<i>Economic Resources 2030</i>	9.3	11.6	
	<i>Defence Resources 2030</i>	4.1		
	<i>Broad Resources 2030</i>	17.3		
	<i>Demographic Resources 2050</i>	19.1		

(Fathun, Gideon, 2023).

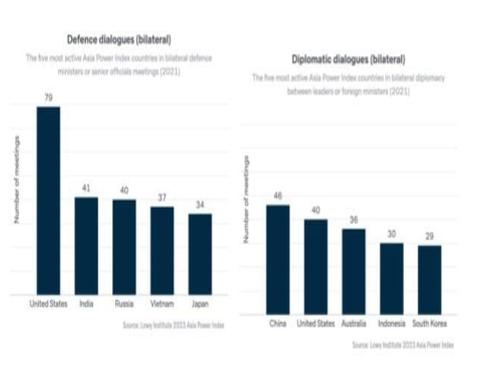
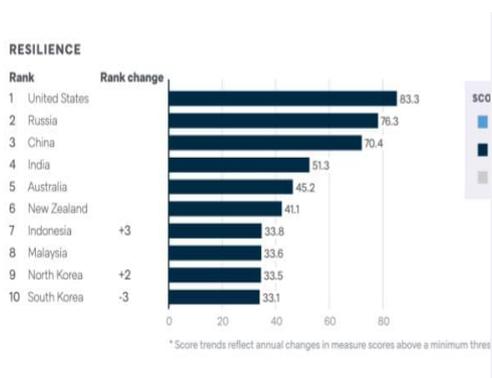
The author outlines and explains these two dimensions in the Poliheuristic analysis contained in the following table:

Code	Dimension	Evaluation Criteria
D1	Politics	Does policy A (1/2) affirm Indonesia's position with free active politics and align with President Joko Widodo's 4+1 foreign policy?
D2	Security	Can policy A (1/2) ensure the defense and security of Indonesia that provides a sense of security for Indonesian citizens through strengthening defense-free and active politics?
Dimension/ Alternative	Indonesia moves to respond to North Natuna with Hard Power (A1)	Indonesia moves to respond to North Natuna with Soft Power (A2)
Political Dimension (D1)	Bargaining arena to prove RI as anti-realism and unilateral claims: 1. Concentric expansion of Indonesia's New Mandala regional policy by creating alliances or security qualia.	1. ASEAN remains the pillar of Indonesia's foreign policy through ARF, AIO, or the ASEAN Political Security Committee.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Initiation of the concept of total war. 3. Utilize security cooperation at the ASEAN level and lobby countries with territorial interests. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Actualization of leadership in Indonesia's leadership in ASEAN to promote a dialogue approach and adherence to the Code of Conduct in the region. 3. Engaging international bodies, including the International Court of Justice (ICJ)
Security Dimension(D3)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Potential to create limited conflict between the two countries. b) There is a tendency for the involvement and intervention of other countries. c) Not following RI's foreign policy line, namely free and active politics with a diplomatic approach. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Commitment to the Treaty of Amity & Cooperation and code of conduct b) Is able to serve as a platform for Confidence Building Measures among Indo-Pacific countries, as the AOIP also promotes security cooperation through mechanisms through ADMM and ARF. c) The South China Sea presents major challenges stemming from conflicting national interests between China and several ASEAN member states. d) Disputes in the East China Sea and North Natuna Sea impact the regional stability in the Indo-Pacific area.

The table above clearly illustrates the various foreign policy options pursued by Indonesia must be logical and have rational considerations and psychological cognition. It shows the quality of the

country's resilience from the possibility of open conflict that can come at an unexpected time. The following is state resilience data based on its capabilities.



(Lowy Institue, 2023)

The two figures above show China's quality in defending against possible attacks. If there is a tendency for open

conflict with Indonesia, China's qualifications and strengths are above Indonesia's. So, it is not rational for

Indonesia to choose the challenging power route to counter China's assertiveness in the North Natuna Sea. Furthermore, it is

very far from Indonesia's military capabilities when viewed from China's military power. Seen in the following table:

Main Capacity	Military Variable	TOTAL
Strategic Model	Personnel	3.134.000
	Defense Budget	\$230.000.000.000
	Total Border	22.457 km
Land Forces	Tank	5250
	Armored	35000
	Self-Propelled Artillery	4120
	Pull Artillery	1734
	Rocket Projector	3160
Air Forces	Fighter/Inceptors	1200
	Combat	371
	Transport	286
	Special Missions	399
	Refueler	114
	Helicopter	912
	Training	399
	Fighter Helicopter	281
Navy	Destroyer	2
	Frigate	1
	Corvette Ship	41
	Submarine	49
	Patrol Ship	70
	Destroyer	79
	Frigate	152

(Fathun, Gideon, 2023).

Indonesia advances its national interests in numerous diplomatic platforms, with a particular focus on preserving stability in the Indo-Pacific region, as outlined in the table below:

Number	Activity	Years	Point of Meeting
1	<i>International Symposium on "Fostering Regional Connectivity in the IndoPacific Region"</i>	2018	The critical role of connectivity as a catalyst for economic and social progress at the level of transportation corridors, economic corridors, and corridor continuity is in line with ASEAN MPAC 2025 for the Indo-Pacific.

2	<i>International Focus Group Discussion on “Connecting the Connectivities in the Indo-Pacific: Indian Ocean and Rim Chapter</i>	2019	The discussion covered various Indo-Pacific strategies put forward by countries like the United States, Japan, India, and ASEAN member states, highlighting ASEAN and the East Asia Summit as key platforms for regional cooperation. Furthermore, connectivity initiatives in the Indo-Pacific can align with existing frameworks such as the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC), the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), and the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy.
3	<i>International Seminar on “Indo-Pacific Connectivity Outlook”</i>	2019	This second-track seminar discusses the importance of the rise of the Asian Century, which makes the Indo-Pacific a world growth center—on the same occasion, it also presented Indonesia's proposal through maritime cooperation, connectivity, and SDGs for Indo-Pacific cooperation priorities.
4	<i>High-Level Dialogue on Indo-Pacific Cooperation: Towards a Peaceful, Prosperous, and Inclusive Region</i>	2019	A platform was established for countries in the Indo-Pacific to exchange views and ideas on regional cooperation, grounded in the principles of openness, inclusivity, transparency, and adherence to international law. The forum brought together ministers and high-ranking government officials, serving as a continuation of in-depth discussions on the ASEAN Collective Concept: An Indo-Pacific Outlook.
5	Konsultasi dengan Pemangku Kepentingan di Dalam dan di Luar Negeri	2017-2019	A dialog process between Indonesian Ministries/Institutions, foreign governments, think tanks, and other stakeholders related to the Indo-Pacific.
6	<i>ASEAN SOM Retreat</i>	2019	The meeting agreed on the ASEAN Indo-Pacific Outlook concept terminology as ASEAN's standard nomenclature.
7	<i>ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting</i>	2019	This forum discussed the AOIP draft, emphasizing the importance of ASEAN centrality. The name of the draft was changed to ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.
8	<i>34th ASEAN DeSummit</i>	2019	ASEAN leaders adopted the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as a framework for the region's engagement and collaboration within the Indo-Pacific. The AOIP highlights key principles such as ASEAN centrality, inclusiveness, a strong commitment to cooperation and adherence to international law through ASEAN-led mechanisms.
9	Diseminasi AOIP di <i>East Asia Summit 2019</i>	2019	The dissemination of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) serves to highlight ASEAN's role in promoting peace, stability, and prosperity across the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. One example of this is Indonesia's initiative to host the upcoming Indo-Pacific Infrastructure and Connectivity Forum.

(Fathun, Gideon, 2023).

Thus, from several explanations above, both from political and security considerations that show a response to assertive China in the North Natuna Sea, diplomatic policy is favorable for Indonesia. It is also a cognitive and psychological consideration because it will not be very balanced to compare the capabilities of China and Indonesia if there is an open conflict. It means that the diplomatic path is rational rather than causing total defeat. The author also argues that it is difficult for China to expand to Indonesia. The consideration is that the two countries, culturally and bilaterally, have been in contact for a long time and very well. Therefore, the rational choice is to withdraw from high escalation. As for China's assertiveness, it has just returned to the rules of international law as an excellent judge to consider territorial ownership.

2. Philippine Foreign Policy Response in the Indo-Pacific Region

Based on an interview with Samosir (2023), the 1987 Constitution, Article II, Section 7, states that the Philippines shall follow an independent foreign policy. In dealing with other nations, key priorities include national sovereignty, territorial integrity, national interests, and the right to self-determination. Republic Act No. 7157, also known as the "Philippine Foreign Service Act of 1991," tasks the Department

of Foreign Affairs with advancing the three main pillars of the country's foreign policy: (a) safeguarding and strengthening national security, (b) promoting economic security, and (c) protecting the rights and advancing the welfare and interests of Filipinos abroad. President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. adopted the foreign policy principle of being "a friend to all and an enemy to none," highlighting the nation's commitment to an independent stance. In his State of the Nation Address on July 24, 2023, President Marcos stated that this independent approach has effectively supported the country's goals in peacebuilding and mutually beneficial cooperation. Within his first year in office, this policy direction has attracted an estimated total investment of 3.9 trillion pesos (approximately USD 71 billion), with promising prospects for further economic growth.

Border issues between the Philippines and China are characterized by the escalation of border conflicts, especially in the South China Sea (SCS) or West Philippine Sea (WPS). The construction of shoals in the disputed area by China in the early 1990s triggered the Philippine Government to station 2 military vessels already used at two points, namely Scarborough Shoal (BRP Benguet) and Ayuing Shoal (BRP Sierra Madre), in May 1999. One month later, BRP Benguet was removed by the Philippine Government.

Relations with China have heated up since the Scarborough Shoal standoff on April 10, 2012. The Philippine Navy ship BRP Gregorio Del Pilar, which tried to arrest 10 Chinese fishing boats, was intercepted by Chinese Marine Surveillance vessels and conveyed that the area was Chinese territory. The Scarborough Shoal standoff continued with the submission of claims regarding the validity of China's nine-dash line claim to the Chinese Government through the International Court of Arbitration on January 22, 2013. On July 12, 2016, the Arbitral Tribunal in the South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of the Philippines v. The People's Republic of China) unanimously rejected the validity of the Chinese Government's claim to the nine-dash line.

In 2016-2023, the Philippine Government sent more than 485 diplomatic notes of protest to the Chinese Government regarding incidents of violation of the International Court of Arbitration's decision. The intensity of sending protest notes has increased dramatically since 2020. A total of 445 protest notes were sent, including 97 diplomatic notes during the administration of President Ferdinand "BBM" Marcos. During the 7th Meeting on the Philippines-China Bilateral Consultation Mechanism (BCM) on March 24, 2023, in Manila, both sides emphasized diplomatic engagement on maritime issues in the LCS/WPS. Undersecretary for Bilateral Relations and ASEAN Affairs of the Philippine Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, Teresa Lazaro, said that the Philippines and China agreed that maritime issues do not affect the overall diplomatic relations between aforementioned countries. However, maritime issues remain a serious concern for the Philippines.

Incidents of trespassing continue and are considered to have threatened the safety of local fishermen and interfered with Philippine sovereignty. In this regard, the Philippine Government "embraced" its alliance, in this case, the United States (US)-Australia, to conduct joint maritime exercises as a multilateralism approach in order to collectively focus the international community's attention and pressure on China's aggressiveness in the LCS/WPS. In addition, the Philippine Government is also maximizing the presence of law enforcement agencies in the LCS/WPS maritime disputed area, including by planning to integrate maritime patrols between the Philippine Navy (PN) and the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) in the vicinity of the LCS/WPS maritime border area. Addition of US Military Base locations within the framework of EDCA.

In the 2014 EDCA agreement, it was agreed that we would manage ten military bases in the Philippines. A further five military bases were agreed in 2015. Four additional military bases were agreed upon in October 2022 but only announced by the Philippine Government in April 2023. In general, cooperation under the EDCA umbrella is not projected only for military

activities and offensive operations but also to assist and respond quickly when the Philippines needs assistance related to natural disasters. Internally, in the Philippines, the central discourse of EDCA cooperation is the US re-entry into Philippine territory after the expiration of Clark and Subic Military Bases in 1992. Increased Chinese provocations in the LCS/WPS after the inactivity of Clark and Subic became the backdrop for the Philippines to develop closer military cooperation with the US.

The US military presence in EDCA guarantees the Philippines to “mitigate” China's aggressiveness. However, some in the Philippines believe that selecting EDCA's new location is less about protecting the Philippines' needs in the WPS and more about anticipating a China-Taiwan conflict. The Chinese government responded to the addition of EDCA bases as a policy to secure US hegemony and geopolitical interests to “encircle” China through military alliances with countries around China, including the Philippines. The Chinese Government considers the participation of the Philippines in the US geopolitical dispute map to be very detrimental to the national interests of the Philippines. It undermines peace and stability in the region.

The development of the economic power of Filipino citizens of Chinese descent also creates social friction with the local population. Despite the participation of mixed ethnic Chinese in the revolution

against Spain, negative sentiments towards ethnic Chinese continued to grow during the US leadership in the Philippines. Under President Ferdinand Marcos Sr, Philippine-Chinese trade relations were re-established. In fact, in 1974, the mass naturalization law of ethnic Chinese Filipinos was enacted. Since the administration of Ferdinand Marcos Sr, China has become the Philippines' leading trading partner, especially in the importation of petroleum and its derivative products.

Anti-China sentiment is growing again after various incidents in the LCS/WPS, starting from the Mischief Reef Incident in 1996, the Chinese Naval Incursion in 2011, the Scarborough Shoal standoff in 2012, and China's nine-dash line claim. Apart from political tensions, China is the Philippines' leading trading partner, the third-largest partner for exports, and the most significant partner for imports. Since the opening of diplomatic relations in 1974, every Philippine President has made a state visit to China. China is also the third country President Ferdinand “BBM” Marcos Jr. visited within the framework of a State Visit after Indonesia and Singapore in January 2023. If we look back at the data presented in the figure above, it can be concluded that the qualifications and abilities of the Philippines are still below Indonesia. It means that even Indonesia, which has the capabilities shown in the table above, has yet to be able to keep up with China. It means that the rational

choice for the Philippines is to lobby and negotiate to convince China of the ownership of the claimed territorial dispute. Another mechanism is the ICJ as a court institution to decide the territorial dispute. It means that if the Philippines uses military force rationally, total defeat is inevitable. The comparison of the two countries is very far between military capabilities, economic quality, military cooperation, and other variables.

The Philippines' alternative policy is to rebuild its military qualifications with other countries that are its strategic partners. It means that one of the advantages of the Philippines over Indonesia is that it has military qualification partners who might be able to help if China's assertiveness gets stronger. However, that argument only sometimes compensates for China's increasing capabilities.

3. Comparative Modeling of Indonesia - Philippines Foreign Policy in the Indo-Pacific Region

The response of bilateral cooperation and collaboration is also a reason to maintain security stability in the Indo-Pacific Region, especially the South China Sea conflict. Even though Indonesia is not related to the South China Sea, the security and stability of the region is Indonesia's commitment to contribute to world peace. Meanwhile, the Philippines does have a conflict with China. The Philippines and Indonesia do not have border issues,

considering the two countries signed an Exclusive Economic Zone agreement in 2014, effective in August 2019. The enforcement of the Indonesia-Philippines EEZ boundary took about 25 years. For 20 years, the negotiation process from 1994-2014, and 5 years for the internal settlement process of each country.

According to (2023), the Staff of the Indonesian Consulate General in Manila said that Indonesia-Philippines Diplomatic Relations Politically, it can be said that the Philippines places Indonesia as a priority in foreign political relations. The selection of Indonesia indicates this as the first destination country of the State Visit of the Philippine President, both President Rodrigo Roa Duterte (September 8-10, 2016) and President Ferdinand "BBM" Marcos Jr (September 5-7, 2022). Indonesia and the Philippines have had a harmonious relationship for 74 years since the opening of diplomatic relations on November 24, 1949. The two countries have no political, border, or security issues. Every issue, such as boundary negotiations and border security issues, can be discussed peacefully at the negotiating table.

The relationship between Indonesia and the Philippines remains burdened by past border conflicts. However, the advantage is that both countries feel free from the need to be as assertive and aggressive as China does to either Indonesia or the Philippines. Thus, it can be concluded:

1) Indonesia and the Philippines share a mutual concern regarding China's expansive territorial claims in their respective maritime zones. China asserts sovereignty over the North Natuna Sea, which overlaps with Indonesia's exclusive economic zone, and large portions of the South China Sea, encroaching on areas claimed by the Philippines. On July 12, 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled in favor of the Philippines, concluding that China's assertions of historical rights, including the nine-dash line claim, lack legal foundation under international law. The tribunal determined that while various countries, including China, have historically accessed features in the South China Sea, there was no conclusive evidence that China had ever exercised exclusive authority or effective control over those territories and their associated maritime resources.

2) China continued to defy and disrespect the decision after the decision. On the other hand, in 2016, the Philippines changed its President, Rodrigo Duterte, who is known for being "anti-american" but "pro-China," which is the reason for the change in Philippine foreign policy, where the Philippines decided to renegotiate with China on this matter. Indonesia and the Philippines can work together to build collaboration by using a diplomatic approach to pressure China to comply

with international law. Alternatively, force China to obey the Code of Conduct that has been agreed upon. In the ASEAN forum, Indonesia, the Philippines, and other ASEAN countries agreed to encourage a peaceful resolution of the LCS / WPS conflict through a diplomatic forum with China. The signing of the RI-Philippines Bilateral Cooperation Action Plan or Plan of Action (PoA) 2022-2027 in Indonesia. This Action Plan includes various strategic activities in politics, law and security, economy, culture, tourism, consular, protection, and mutual support for candidacy in international institutions.

3) Indonesia and China bring the issue of territorial conflict to the ICJ Institution to get a balanced and rational court to adjudicate the dispute. They can choose one or more ways to resolve the dispute through UNCLOS, including a) The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in Hamburg, Germany. B) The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, The Netherlands, c) Ad hoc arbitration (following Annex VII of UNCLOS). D) A "special arbitral tribunal" constituted for specific categories of disputes (established under Annex VIII of UNCLOS). And e) Permanent Court of Arbitration (Tribunal) - South Sea Arbitration (Souza et al., 2022).

The Philippines brought its dispute against China commencing on January 22, 2023. The requests that the Philippines submitted for resolution fall into four categories, including:

- a. Disputes over natural resource rights and maritime rights in the LCS.
- b. Disputes over maritime zone rights under UNCLOS based on maritime features claimed by the Philippines in the Spratly Islands.
- c. A series of disagreements regarding the legality of China's activities in the South China Sea (LCS).
- d. According to Souza et al. (2022), the Philippines asserts that China has intensified and widened the dispute during the arbitration by limiting access to a Philippine marine detachment and undertaking extensive artificial construction and land reclamation activities in the Spratly Islands.

However, in this case, the negotiations conducted by the countries concerned could be interpreted as a failure; therefore, UNCLOS can be a platform, especially for countries that are weak in the face of state power, such as China, which prefers to conduct bilateral negotiations (one by one) rather than multilateral because it is considered more profitable for them. When the Philippines submitted this issue to the court, China firmly rejected the results, even though it was obvious that China lost, or it could be said that China's claim to the LCS was historically unfounded. Therefore, the presence of UNCLOS in this dispute

became ineffective due to non-compliance and lack of international law enforcement. According to (2023), RI and the Philippines have good maritime security cooperation. Both countries are members of the trilateral cooperation with Malaysia for maritime security in the Sulu Sea. Also, the two countries' cooperation is related to maritime borders in the southern part of the Philippines or the northern part of Indonesia, especially on the island of Miangas. Perwita also said, unlike the Philippines, Indonesia is not a claimant state in the dispute. So, Indonesia always encourages the immediate completion of the Code of Conduct for the region. With the completion of the COC, the two countries can force China to follow the rules and regional orders in the region.

In line with what was conveyed by Fortuna Anwar (2023), the RI-Philippines relationship as a whole is perfect. In maritime security, there is RI-Mal-Fil trilateral cooperation in the Sulu Sea. BIMP-EAGA sub-regional economic cooperation involves the southern Philippines and North Sulawesi. Many Indonesians live in the southern Philippines. RI supports the integrity of UNCLOS in principle. However, Indonesia did not explicitly support the 2016 PCA ruling that affirmed the Philippines' ownership of part of the LCS following UNCLOS. RI/ASEAN normatively affirmed that UNCLOS is the only legal basis for ownership in the LCS, so the PRC's claim is baseless. However, the Philippines is disappointed that RI/ASEAN

is hesitant to openly criticize the PRC for its aggression in the LCS, including actions against the Philippines' claims.

Then, Mr. Marty (2023), an analyst from the Philippines, said that bilateral relations between the Philippines and Indonesia have a long history and great untapped potential. The Indonesian people are brothers to the Filipino people in terms of history and cultural heritage. There is much to be won in the future for both nations. Both countries can build it together. As the world's two largest archipelagic states, the Philippines championed the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Law of the Sea together, and the Philippines navigated issues of marine resources and conservation together. The Philippines stands together in the region's evolving economic, strategic, and geopolitical significance.

Philippine policy has always been based on dialogue and an ongoing commitment to uphold international laws and treaties. The potential for conflict in the Indo-Pacific only spurs us to continue advocating for peaceful resolution. Like the above, the Philippines believes in engaging China through dialog based on international law. Presenting the legal underpinnings of Philippine territorial integrity and forming a solid case from it has been our response, alongside building our physical capabilities to monitor and respond to situations at sea. Our law-based approach culminated in the 2016 Arbitral Award in The Hague. Since then, we have continued to engage with

China on this issue while conveying incidents to the global community - which also places great importance on freedom of navigation in the region - with transparency and precise nuance. Thus, showing that maritime security cooperation between Indonesia and the Philippines is excellent.

Furthermore, it could create collaboration to pressure China not to make unilateral claims to both countries based on historical experience so that it will disrupt the stability of the security of the Indo-Pacific Region and create polarization between those who support and reject. That is why collective security is essential to overcome the regional security dilemma. Collective security refers to each activity having the same interest in cooperation, recognizing that the complexity of security cannot be resolved independently, and building collaboration with multiple channels.

Comparative Analysis: Indonesia vs Philippines in Maritime Security

Philippines

Maritime policy under the Marcos Jr. administration is anchored in the **rule-of-law**, with a layered strategy involving legal, diplomatic, and capability-building initiatives:

- In **July 2024**, Manila ratified a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) with Japan that facilitates military cooperation and interoperability and is

viewed as a strategic step toward reinforcing a rules-based Indo-Pacific order (Reuters, 2024).

- The country has implemented a **transparency initiative**, publicly documenting Chinese coast guard incidents in the South China Sea—such as water cannon and collision episodes—to garner international support and defend navigational rights (AP News, 2025; Reuters, 2025).
- Philippine officials have regularly condemned incidents like water cannon use near Sandy Cay and Second Thomas Shoal, reinforcing freedom of navigation through international forums (AP, 2025b; AP, 2025c).
- The country has modernized maritime enforcement via legislation like the 2024 Maritime Zones Act and through joint law-enforcement exercises with allies, including the United States (Reuters, 2025).

Indonesia

Indonesia emphasizes **ASEAN-based diplomatic cooperation and soft-security measures**:

- It has participated in **trilateral patrols** with the Philippines and Malaysia in the Sulu–Celebes Sea to counter piracy and militant threats, such as those posed by Abu Sayyaf/ISIS-affiliated groups (Reuters, 2017; GMA, 2017).
- In 2023, Indonesia helped lead the **ASEAN Coast Guard Forum**, designed to strengthen capacity building, information sharing, and confidence among ASEAN maritime law enforcement agencies (Da Costa, 2023). It hosted the **2025 Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo (MNEK)**, featuring **38 nations and 19 foreign warships**, aimed at bolstering maritime cooperation, disaster response capabilities, and regional interoperability (*30+ navies*) (Reuters, 2023; Reddit, 2025; Modern Diplomacy, 2025).
- Indonesia helped launch the **ASEAN Coast Guard Forum**, enhancing regional law enforcement collaboration and capacity building (Da Costa, 2023)

CONCLUSIONS

The Indo-Pacific region is a regional area that has several opportunities and challenges. The seriousness of countries to utilize the region has led to the creation of alliances, qualia, and security cooperation to create inclusive and exclusive regional cooperation. It means that the Indo-Pacific regional area is very strategic because it provides the potential for maritime cooperation that produces large profits. On the other hand, control over the region is evidence of how the country's political and security capabilities can master and manage the region in an integrated manner. Therefore, the cooperation carried out is extensive to

prioritize the national interests of each country.

The emergence of competition in the management of the Indo-Pacific Region is evidence that future maritime security challenges are still very promising. This is evidenced by the shift in many countries' foreign policies from nationalistic to regional foreign policies. It means that many countries have foreign policy orientations oriented towards regional areas. For example, China with BRI, the United States with FOIP policy, ASEAN with AIOF policy, India with SAGAR, the creation of the AUKUS alliance and the Quad, and several other collaborations. This condition shows that the attractiveness of the Indo-Pacific regional area has the potential to be managed by several countries.

However, on the other hand, is the emergence of competition in the region to compete for political influence and security. The emergence of the above regional policies allows conflicts in the region, specially creating conflict gaps to expand the region and control the territory. It can be seen as China's assertiveness in the ASEAN Region. It means that China conflicts with several regions in the ASEAN regional area, which, at a macro level, is still part of the Indo-Pacific. This condition can be seen as a conflict in the South China Sea involving China, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and other countries. This conflict has been too

long but has a meeting point until now because each country is consistent with their respective interests. This fact shows that almost all territorial conflicts involving China are unilateral, based on historical claims.

The Philippines is one of the countries that is also involved with China in the conflict. China's assertiveness to date is still consistent in making the area part of its territory that has existed since the days of its empire. Nevertheless, in the Philippines, based on the legal facts of UNCLOS, the contested area belongs to them. Regarding Philippine foreign policy, applying the complex power method will be complicated because China's capabilities are superior. That is why what can be done is through international law, bilateral or through the judiciary, and bilateral or multilateral mechanisms as a method of conflict resolution.

Indonesia also experienced the same thing. At the same time, Indonesia was the initiator and catalyst for creating the code of conduct for the South China Sea conflict. However, China's claim is magnified by trying to claim Indonesia's North Natuna sea area. Although not part of the vortex of the South China Sea conflict, this conflict has also heated relations between the two countries. Regarding foreign policy, Indonesia tends to have the same way as the Philippines by using bilateral, multilateral, judicial, or.

In conclusion, Indonesia can only go through diplomatic channels because China's military capabilities are far above Indonesia's. That is why, if forced with hard power, it will make it difficult for Indonesia to win. In addition, Indonesia still has economic interests in China, so it will be challenging to use complicated power methods. Thus, the conflict between the two countries must understand each other and resolve it together and without unilateral interests.

Based on the two cases above, it shows that the Indo-Pacific region leaves a significant conflict that has the potential to disrupt regional stability. The above conflicts are only a tiny part of the conflicts involving large countries. Therefore, diplomatic mechanisms must be intensified so that each country does not claim each other's territories to be able to create conflicts in the region.

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