

Rethinking Indonesia's Response to the Sino-U.S. Competition through the Lens of Constructivism

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Abstract

The emergence of China as a major power in the world has provoked turmoil among countries, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. This situation was then responded to by the Western major powers, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, which carried out various maneuvers to counter China. Facing this situation, Indonesia has consistently conducted a middle-ground policy by not siding with one of the conflicting parties. Some scholars name this policy as a hedging strategy. Notwithstanding, existing research limits the explanations of the economic and security factors influencing Indonesia's position while overlooking non-material aspects. Against this background, this article seeks to fill this gap by analyzing Indonesia's policy using the constructivist approach and explanatory qualitative research method. This research found three ideational aspects that shape the Indonesian government in issuing foreign policies related to major power competition in the Asia-Pacific, namely principles, values, and state identity. The concerned values and principles highlight that Indonesia adheres to *Pancasila* and "free and active" foreign policy principles which are primarily influenced by past colonialization and the struggle for independence. Meanwhile, identity refers to the international situation in which Indonesia has been exercising a vital role as the leader of global south countries.

Keywords: China, constructivism, hedging strategy, Indonesia, the United States

Abstrak

Kemunculan China sebagai kekuatan baru di dunia menimbulkan gejolak diantara negara-negara, khususnya di kawasan Asia Pasifik. Situasi ini kemudian direspon oleh negara-negara adidaya barat terutama Amerika Serikat dan Inggris yang melakukan berbagai manuver untuk melawan China. Menghadapi situasi tersebut, pemerintah Indonesia tetap konsisten mengeluarkan kebijakan jalan tengah dengan tidak berpihak pada salah satu blok. Beberapa peneliti menyebut kebijakan tersebut sebagai strategi "hedging". Meskipun demikian, penelitian yang sudah ada hanya memberikan pemaparan mengenai faktor ekonomi dan keamanan sebagai faktor yang mempengaruhi posisi Indonesia namun mengabaikan aspek-aspek non-materi. Oleh karena itu, artikel ini berkontribusi melengkapi penelitian sebelumnya dengan menganalisis kebijakan pemerintah Indonesia menggunakan pendekatan konstruktivisme dan metode penelitian kualitatif eksplanatif. Penelitian ini menemukan ada 3 aspek non-materi yang mempengaruhi pemerintah Indonesia dalam mengeluarkan kebijakan luar negeri terkait persaingan negara adidaya di Asia-Pasifik, yaitu prinsip, nilai, dan identitas negara. Prinsip dan nilai yang dimaksud menyoroti fakta bahwa Indonesia menganut kebijakan luar negeri bebas-aktif serta Pancasila, yang mana keduanya sangat dipengaruhi oleh penjajahan di masa lalu serta perjuangan kemerdekaan. Sementara itu, identitas mengacu pada situasi internasional di mana Indonesia telah memainkan peran penting sebagai pemimpin negara-negara di belahan dunia selatan.

Kata kunci: Amerika Serikat, Cina, Indonesia, konstruktivisme, strategi hedging

INTRODUCTION

Asia-Pacific Region has drawn considerable attention from world leaders and political scholars across the globe for these past few decades, considering the rising tension among countries in the region. Several events have contributed to creating the grim situation in the region, such as the long-drawn conflict in the Korean Peninsula, the case of Senkaku Islands, which has been a dispute between the Chinese and Japanese governments since 1971 (Sato, 2019), the establishment of security partnership among Australia, United Kingdom, and the United States or known as AUKUS in 2021 (Shoebridge, 2021), not to mention ballistic missile tests frequently launched by North Korean government (Lendon & Yeung, 2023). However, the discussion over Asia-Pacific is heavily attached to China's increasing power and assertive foreign policies toward its neighboring countries (Odgaard, 2007; Saunders, 2014; Schreer, 2019; Shoebridge, 2021). Thus, it made this issue as a main triggering factor for instability in the region.

Since taking office in late 2012, Xi Jinping has been diverting China into a new foreign policy direction, which is believed to be more vocal and proactive in international affairs (Zhang, 2015). Additionally, Xi Jinping promoted the "China Dream" through his speech on November 29 2012, "realizing the great revitalization of the Chinese nation is also the greatest China Dream of our nation in the coming generation," which then became a more widespread slogan in China (Hizi, 2019). The notion of the "China Dream" – which was launched earlier in 2010 in a book titled "The Chinese Dream: Great Power Thinking

and Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era" written by Liu Mingfu – is manifested in some controversial policies such as massive military expansion, the mega-project Belt and Road Initiative, as well as China's persistent efforts to incorporate the South China Sea and the Senkaku Islands into its territory which illustrate Beijing's intention to be a new major power (Berkofsky, 2016: 110).

Further, the spirit to "rejuvenate the Chinese nation" has received diverse responses. On the one hand, it is argued that the current Beijing foreign policy is not distinct from the previous regime, which honors peaceful and stable relationships with its counterparts around the world, and that the current foreign policy approach is aimed only at protecting its national interests as well as domestic development progress (Zhang, 2015). On the other hand, considering Beijing's more proactive and aggressive gestures in international politics, many feel that numerous China maneuvers led by Xi Jinping in realizing Chinese revitalization and safeguarding its national interests contradict its claim of peaceful foreign policy. Southeast Asian countries, some of which share a border with China, are the regions that are inevitably impacted by China's growing influence.

Talking about its geographical proximity, for example, the Southeast Asia region is China's main target in order to implement the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (Gong, 2019). Moreover, despite the long-standing conflict in the South China Sea, Beijing consistently maintains close relations with its Southeast Asian neighbor through economic development cooperation, making the majority of Southeast Asian

states such as Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos increasingly dependent on Chinese investment and development aid (Mobley, 2019; Ujvari, 2019).

As the biggest country in Southeast Asia and *de facto* leader of ASEAN, the attitude of Indonesia towards the rising China is assumed to be an essential issue. It is worth noting that, apart from being one of the ASEAN's founders, Indonesia is keen to exercise a significant role in maintaining the association's autonomy in facing international issues. For instance, regarding security management, such as the Cambodian conflict, the South China Sea dispute, and securing the Malacca Strait from maritime crime, Indonesia endeavored to promote regional solutions for regional problems (Emmers, 2014). Even more detailed, despite a very apparent divergent attitude among ASEAN claimant states, the Indonesian government consistently supports the process of establishing regional arrangements rather than providing opportunities for external actors, such as China and the United States, to shape the stance of ASEAN to South China Sea case (Roberts, 2018).

That said, as China's power increases substantially, the policy of the Indonesian government has, once again, become essential to be explored, considering its active role in ASEAN. Several scholars pointed out that the Indonesian government has been employing a hedging strategy towards China such as mentioned by Yan (2021); Anwar (2022); Mubah (2019); Iksan & Soong (2022); and Mursitama & Ying (2021). Nevertheless, it remains an unresolved question why hedging strategy has been said as the

characteristic of Jakarta's attitude towards Beijing. In the work of Mursitama & Ying (2021), it is argued that the regime of President Joko Widodo has implemented "a hedging with balancing" approach in terms of economic cooperation with China. Meanwhile, Iksan & Soong (2022) elaborate on the Indonesian government's ability to perform a hedging strategy amidst the China-led Belt and Road Initiative and U.S.-backed Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.

Hence, this article intends to fill the research gap by analyzing the driving factors that shape the Indonesian government's response to China, which has undergone a significant increase in its economic and military as well as China-U.S. rivalry in the international system, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. Since the existing research mainly focuses on the Indonesian strategy, this research will explore the determinants of the strategy itself by applying the non-materialistic perspective contained in constructivism theory to answer the issue from different points of view. This article argues that limiting research to economic or security aspects is not enough to explain the hedging policy implemented by Indonesia. The interests of economic gain and security assurance may explain why Indonesia chose a hedging strategy instead of balancing. Nevertheless, those dimensions do not adequately enlighten why a bandwagoning strategy is not an option.

Constructivism: The Way Ideational Aspects Shape State's Foreign Policy

Constructivist theory emerged during the end of the Cold War to challenge rationalist and critical theory.

It emphasizes that non-material structures such as norms, beliefs, values, principles, and ideology are just as important as material structures in shaping states' identity, which can significantly influence states' interests, behavior, and policy choices (Katzenstein, 1996). Thus, national interest or identity is subject to change following norms shift experienced by the state. Furthermore, the constructivist view also highlights the social interactions among actors as well as between the actor and its environment in the international system that holds the ability to provoke the state to take or not take specific policies. Indeed, the influence of this interaction can be seen from the development of the world situation since World War I, and countries tended to compete and stimulate inter-state disputes.

On the contrary, induced by enormous regional and international fora that can be an instrument of socializing, today's states are prioritizing cooperation and collaboration, not to mention international rules and norms that are built to prevent conflict and war. Accordingly, international institutions have regulative and constitutive functions (Griffiths et al., 2009). Based on the former, international organizations and forums are instruments for setting the standard of behaviors that should and should not be carried out by states. Meanwhile, the latter provides the definition and meanings of the prescribed behavior through legal provisions.

Moreover, unlike the realist view, which argues that an anarchic international system causes states' assertive behavior, the constructivist

school believes that states and international systems are mutually influenced by each other, as stated by Alexander Wendt that "anarchy is what state makes of it" (Wendt, 1992). Hence, international politics is not only about conflict, competition, and struggle for power but instead shared values and interests among states that make it feasible to establish international regimes and rules (Reus-Smit, 2005; Acharya, 2009).

In this context, this article argues that the decision of the Indonesian government to be a neutral yet active actor in the face of the Sino-U.S. confrontation is not merely influenced by its economic and strategic interests but rather has also been motivated by non-material dimensions, such as values, principles, and identity which are deeply rooted in Indonesian society. The aspects in question include Indonesia's fundamental values, such as anti-communism and anti-capitalism-liberalism sentiment widely developed in Indonesia, foreign policy principles, and the state's identity as the leader of global southern countries. Dados & Conell (2012) define the global south as low-income and marginalized non-European and North American states regarding politics and culture.

Research Methods

This article applies the qualitative explanative method to discover the background of Indonesia's so-called hedging strategy. The qualitative method was preferred to the quantitative because it can provide an in-depth explanation of abstract facts, such as non-material structures that affect the policies, attitudes, and interests of

countries in the international system. This research elaborates and analyzes three crucial aspects: principle, values, and state identity.

The main arguments of this research are drawn from various secondary sources such as government documents, journals, books, news, and reports that can provide an overview of how the values and principles embraced by the Indonesian people, as well as the state's identity encourage the government of Indonesia to act as a neutral actor amid competition from China and the United States that attempt to attract other countries into their side.

Furthermore, this research is delivered into four sections, namely introduction, theoretical framework, research method as well as results, and discussion, which encompasses a presentation on Indonesian foreign policy with regards to the rising China as well as growing Sino-U.S. competition and the effect of three aspects on Indonesian foreign policy namely values, principle, and identity. The values referred to in this study are those contained in *Pancasila* that encourage an anti-foreign ideology attitude among Indonesian people. The principles to be studied are those related to Indonesia's foreign policy, which adopts the principle of free and active. Moreover, the state identity explored by this research is Indonesia as the leader of global south countries, especially ASEAN.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indonesian Foreign Policy Amidst the Growing Tension in Asia Pacific

Indonesia is repeatedly considered to hold an essential position in the region, both in Southeast Asia and the wider

Asia-Pacific region. Since its independence, Indonesia has been actively contributing to international and regional politics. The state became one of the founding fathers of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1961 and 1967, respectively. This archipelagic country is also located on a strategic international trade route – known as the Maritime Silk Road – and enjoys a vast geography, a huge population of more than 270 million people, and an abundance of natural resources (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023; Emmers, 2014). Additionally, Indonesia is the sole G20 member from Southeast Asia region, which illustrates Indonesia's considerable essential economic power. Therefore, Indonesia is unsurprisingly identified as a middle power along with several other states, such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia (Abbondanza, 2022).

Amidst the increasingly volatile situation in Asia-Pacific, including Sino-U.S. hostile competition, Indonesia shows a neutral yet pragmatic stance. This approach is demonstrated through Indonesia's efforts to play a more significant role in the region while taking advantage of China's rapid power growth without officially declaring its inclination. For example, Jakarta joined the battle of geographical concepts taking place in the Asia-Pacific region by proposing the Indo-Pacific Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 2013 to balance other frameworks endorsed by other countries, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, commonly known as Quad, as well as Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) (Scott, 2019). These two arrangements were introduced by India

and Japan, respectively, to counter China's rapidly growing power, which is considered to endanger the existing international order in the Asia-Pacific region. However, they are composed of countries that feel threatened by China, such as India, Japan, Australia, and the United States. Those states also underline the urgency of democratic values incompatible with Chinese communist ideology.

In the first stage, the Indian government initiated Quad in 2004 to provide humanitarian assistance to Indonesia, severely hit by the tsunami disaster in Aceh Province. The project was later joined by other maritime nations in Asia-Pacific, such as Japan, Australia, and the United States, and gradually evolved into strategic cooperation covering military activities and dialogue. Though the Quad was halted in 2007 due to Japanese and Australian withdrawal, the four countries agreed to revitalize the Quad in 2017, motivated by the spirit of countering China's increasingly assertive movements (Envall, 2019; Kliem, 2020; Rai, 2018). Meanwhile, Japan, which has a conflictual relationship with China on the Senkaku Islands, felt threatened by Beijing's power, so it offered another cooperation architecture known as Free and Open Indo Pacific (FOIP) during the Shinzo Abe administration in 2007. The FOIP originated from Shinzo Abe's speech during his visit to India titled "Confluence of the Two Seas," which emphasized the role of both countries in promoting the values of democracy, transparency, freedom of navigation, and rules-based order in the Asia Pacific region.

"by Japan and India coming together in this way, this "broader Asia" will evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States of America and Australia. Open and transparent, this network will allow people, goods, capital, and knowledge to flow freely. Can we not say that faced with this wide, open, broader Asia, it is incumbent upon us two democracies, Japan and India, to carry out the pursuit of freedom and prosperity in the region? In addition, as maritime states, both India and Japan have vital interests in the security of sea lanes. It goes without saying that the sea lanes to which I refer are the shipping routes that are the most critical for the world economy. From now on let us together bear this weighty responsibility that has been entrusted to us, by joining forces with like-minded countries, shall we not, ladies and gentlemen?" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, 2007)

It is noteworthy that the Indonesian government is also confronted with other anti-China regional projects, such as the trilateral security pact signed by Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (AUKUS) in 2021 and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which was later transformed into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in 2018. Indonesia's response to these frameworks is clear: the government has refused to engage.

The question remains, does declining the projects mean that Indonesia is siding with China? This article supports the idea that Indonesia has implemented a hedging strategy amidst the growing rivalry in the region. As mentioned by Tan (2020), hedging does not imply the "passive neutrality" of Southeast Asian countries since they vigorously pursue economic and strategic advantages from both

competing parties. For example, according to Mubah (2019), Indonesian elites perform a double hedging strategy by expanding economic cooperation with China while retaining security and strategic relations with the United States, mainly related to the issue of the South China Sea. In 2020, the United States assisted Indonesia with \$14 million and more than \$2.3 million in Foreign Military Financing and International Military Education and Training funds, respectively (The U.S. Department of State, 2021). Indeed, despite its improved economic cooperation, the Indonesian government has had to face several conflicts with China in the South China Sea, including territorial disputes and illegal fishing activities in the Natuna waters, which is covered in China's nine-dash line. The dotted line on the Chinese government's map version indicates China's claim to most of the South China Sea area based on the historical territory of the Chinese empire (Hayton, 2016). In response, the Indonesian government has protested several times by summoning the Chinese ambassador in January 2020 as well as sending two letters to the United Nations - emphasizing that the Natuna Islands, along with its surrounding waters, belong to Indonesia - in 2010 and 2020 (Kipgen, 2021)

Though Indonesia keeps maintaining a peaceful diplomatic approach in defending its right over the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around Natuna Islands, the government has been regularly mobilizing Indonesian naval forces to patrol around the island's territorial waters and escalating military spending to improve military installations as well as number of

personnel in Natuna (Kipgen, 2021; Meyer et al., 2019). Moreover, to signal Jakarta's firm stance on China's claim over the entire South China Sea, the government issued a policy to rename the northern area of the Natuna Island as North Natuna Sea, which provoked different responses from China and the United States (Sapiie, 2017). The former expressed concern and disagreement by arguing that the decision of the Indonesian government did not comply with the international agreement, which labels the entire region as South China Sea. Meanwhile, support for the renaming of the North Natuna Sea was conveyed by Washington during the visit of the US Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, to Jakarta on January 24, 2018 (South China Morning Post, 2018). Indeed, this phenomenon illustrates an unsatisfactory situation for Jakarta to side with China, although it is undeniable that Indonesia-China relations have significantly improved in recent years.

Furthermore, it is notable that Indonesia's foreign policy has emphasized the centrality of ASEAN by encouraging its ASEAN counterparts to initiate an ASEAN-led framework, given the many mechanisms proliferated by other countries that challenge ASEAN's leadership in its region (Tan, 2020; Thi, 2022). Against this background, ASEAN approved the ASEAN Outlook on the Asia-Pacific (AOIP) during the 34th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in June 2019 (Sukma, 2019; Thi Ha, 2019). Towards this newly-formed framework, Washington demonstrated a positive attitude through some statements of its governmental elites, such as the speech of the U.S. Vice President, Kamala Harris, that ASEAN "remains central to the region's

architecture” (The White House, 2021) and U.S. Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinken, that “ASEAN centrality is the foundation of the regional architecture” (U.S. Department of State, 2021). Oppositely, the Chinese government responded reluctantly by noting its policy vagueness, which provides opportunities for China’s competitors to increase their influence in the region (Jaknanihan, 2022).

Constructivist Motivations of Indonesian Foreign Policy

As mentioned above, Indonesian foreign policies in the Asia Pacific depict the firmness of the Indonesian government to maintain a hedging strategy and create a middle ground in dealing with current foreign challenges. Unlike its neighboring countries – India, Japan, or the Philippines – which express more assertive responses towards Beijing’s aggressive movements by allying with the United States and forming regional frameworks to contend with China or suing the Chinese government in the Permanent Court of Arbitration, Indonesia is consistently neutral and relying on diplomatic approaches (Oratmangun, 2022).

This section explains the driving forces of Indonesian behavior in handling the ever-increasing tension in the Asia-Pacific region by highlighting the role of non-material structures in shaping Indonesian foreign policy. Although strategic studies have been dominated by the rationalist perspective, comprising structural realism and neoliberalism, constructivism offers an alternative perspective to understand how a state responds to external challenges and threats.

***Pancasila* as the Guiding Value**

The first aspect that forms Indonesia’s foreign policy is national value. The value itself is defined by Lucarelli (2006) as ideas that are considered positive to establish order and “meaning we try to give to our world.” Before the Declaration of Independence, Indonesia had established five fundamental national values, called *Pancasila*, which are belief in God, civilized humanity and justice, Indonesian nationalism and unity, democracy, and social justice for all Indonesian citizens. The substances of *Pancasila* itself are derived from the deeply rooted values that have been applied since before independence and are considered the worldview of the Indonesian people (Zabda, 2016).

Nonetheless, despite the ideology explicitly including democracy, democracy applied in the state is a *Pancasila*-based democratic system. Which is “democracy guided by the inner wisdom of deliberation,” compared to liberal democracy developed in the West. Hence, Indonesia’s foreign policy dealing with East-West competition, as occurred during the Cold War and in the contemporary era between the United States and China, is impartial but still actively engaged in solving global issues. Jakarta might consider that aligning one party with a specific ideology, which is different from *Pancasila*, is not a necessary policy. Aside from that, inspired by the principles of *Pancasila*, the Indonesian regime then persistently instigates peaceful dialogue, cooperation, and collaboration instead of rivalry, antagonistic competition, and confrontation.

Those deeply rooted values also led to the rejection of ideologies other than *Pancasila*, such as the liberal-capitalism, communism, and even Islam, even though the majority of the population embraced Islam. This ideological conflict has also occurred since the preparation for Indonesian independence, as seen in the disagreement between the religiously neutral nationalists and the Muslim nationalists, accompanied by the fierce debate between the Muslim nationalists and the Indonesian Communist Party (Faisal, 2018). Against this backdrop, the Indonesian government has always safeguarded the nation's values and principles, prioritizing national unity and prosperity over ideological battle. Unlike its Japanese and European counterparts, which pay great attention to the spread of democracy in the international system, it tends to favor the United States or Russia, which supports China incited by their similar worldviews. Indonesia has its principle of a free and active foreign policy, namely *Pancasila*, which serves as the source of national ideology or *weltanschauung* and the guidance of its foreign relations.

Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that the anti-colonialism attitude has flourished among the people and leaders of Indonesia, which strongly encourages the urgency of national unity. This attitude eventually triggered negative sentiment against external values, mainly liberal capitalism, and communism, which at the time had the potential to be ridden by the Cold War, causing divisions such as those on the Vietnam and Korean peninsula. It stands to reason, therefore, that Indonesia is highly unlikely to decide in favor of either side, both in the past and present. Concerning this issue, the

Indonesian people will be at the forefront of ensuring that Indonesia's foreign policy does not favor values contrary to the nation's tenets. For example, the Chinese community in Indonesia has faced long-standing discrimination by the native community known as *pribumi*. The hatred towards the Chinese community in Indonesia can be traced back to a series of tragedies in the past when the Indonesian Communist Party strived to change the ideology of *Pancasila* into communism from the early days of independence until 1965, when the party violently attempted to overthrow the ruling government. This attempted coup, followed by the anti-communist movement across the country in 1965-1966, which was reported by local newspapers, killed roughly 500 thousand to 3 million people accused of being associated with the communist party (Tempo, 2016). This massacre was perpetrated by the Indonesian army as well as Muslim groups, which seized the moment to take revenge for the party uprising that killed many Muslim clerics in 1948.

The fear of communism existed in Indonesia afterward, which unfortunately manifested through discrimination against Chinese people. During the Asian Financial Crisis in 1998, the ethnic Chinese were again targeted by Indonesian people because they were assumed as "more successful" in business and owned a better economic condition than the native people. Approximately 100 Chinese women were raped, and 1000 people lost their lives during this riot (Rakhmat & Aryansyah, 2020). In Yogyakarta Province, a special region in Indonesia that is ruled by a local King who is called a *Sultan*, Chinese descent is

prohibited from owning land even if they have lived in Indonesia for generations (Bevins, 2017). The recent regime led by President Joko Widodo is also criticized by enormous Indonesian society for receiving US\$21,2 billion from China in 2021 (Bowden, 2021) and hosting hundreds of Chinese migrant workers at a time when the country was suffering from COVID-19.

Moreover, numerous Muslim societies in Indonesia accuse communist ideology of spreading atheism due to a statement delivered by Karl Marx that “religion is the opium of the people.” Therefore, communism is considered as violating the first values of *Pancasila*, namely belief in One God. In addition, the re-education program for ethnic Uyghurs run by the Chinese government has further increased anti-China sentiment in Indonesia, especially among the Muslim community. Egorova (2021) underlines the unfavorable situation in Indonesia for Beijing, where many local people maintain anti-China sentiment regardless of China's soft diplomacy, which is intensively carried out in Indonesia through economic cooperation and COVID-19 vaccine assistance.

At the same time, negative sentiment towards the United States has also evolved within Indonesian society. This antagonistic attitude is motivated by multiple factors. Firstly, western colonialism was experienced by Indonesian people in the past. Secondly, as the religion that Indonesian people widely practice is Islam, the United States' involvement in several civil wars in the Middle East, as well as its persistent support for Israel's occupation of Palestine, have become another

obstacle for the country to side with the United States.

Last but not least, several Muslim organizations in Indonesia, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, reject the notion of liberalism and capitalism for being alienating from *Pancasila* ideology societal and religious norms (Ilham, 2022; Tempo, 2015). It, thus, can be said that the impetuses of Indonesia's non-alignment decision for not taking sides in the contemporary rivalry between China and the United States are similar to that of Indonesia's non-alignment approach in dealing with Moscow-Washington ideological competition.

Free and Active as a Fundamental Principle

The second determinant of Indonesia's hedging strategy is its foreign policy principle. Lucarelli (2006) described principle as “normative propositions that translate values into general constitutional standards for policy action.” Indeed, the values embedded in *Pancasila* underpin Indonesia's participation in the regional and global political arena, as elaborated in the previous section. Those five fundamental values are then institutionalized in the foreign policy principle and constitution.

Since its independence, Indonesia has adopted *bebas-aktif*, or free and active principle, to conduct its foreign policy. This principle was introduced by one of its founding fathers, Mohammad Hatta, through his notable speech in 1948, “*Mendajung Antara Dua Karang*,” or Rowing between Two Reefs, which referred to the U.S.-Soviet Union rivalry. “.....do we, Indonesians, in the struggle

for the freedom of our people and our country, only have to choose between Russia and America? Is not there any other stand that we can take in the pursuit of our ideals?....” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia, 2018).

Sukma (1995) noted that Indonesia’s foreign policy tenet was motivated by Indonesian historical struggle and internal challenges in the early days of its independence. It is noteworthy that Indonesian people experienced hundreds of years under Dutch colonialism and achieved their independence through self-sufficient struggle and diplomacy, especially when the Dutch government did not recognize Indonesia’s independence and was supported by other Western countries, such as the United States, to re-colonize Indonesia. Moreover, the presence of various ideologies in Indonesia since the pre-independence period, including conflicting ideologies during the Cold War, namely liberal capitalism and communism, awakened the Indonesian leaders, Hatta in particular, to establish the principle of state’s foreign policy that prioritizes the interests and unity of the nation instead of engages in the ideological battle. Interestingly, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, independent and active does not equal neutral standing; instead, it affirms Indonesia’s preference not to engage in any alliance or pact without preventing the country from actively contributing to international politics (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia, 2018).

Furthermore, the Indonesian foreign policy view has been legally formalized in its Constitutional Law

Number 37, enacted in 1999 regarding Indonesia’s Foreign Relations.

“that the implementation of foreign relations activities, both regional and international, through bilateral or multilateral forums, enshrined in the national interest based on the principle of free and active foreign policy”. (The preamble)

"Free and Active is a foreign policy which in essence is not a neutral policy, but rather a foreign policy that is free to determine attitudes and policies towards international problems and does not bind itself a priori to one world power and actively contributes, both in the form of ideas and active participation in resolving conflicts, disputes and other global problems, for the realization of independence, lasting peace and social justice. What is meant by devoted to "national interests" is foreign policy that is carried out to support the realization national goals as stated in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution." (The Elucidation to Law Number 37 of 1999 on Foreign Relations)

This argument is also reiterated in the Resolution No. II/MPR/1993 of the People’s Consultative Assembly:

“Foreign relations shall be conducted on the basis of the independent and active foreign policy and dedicated to the national interest, especially to supporting national development in all spheres of life, and for the purpose of establishing a world order based on freedom, lasting peace and social justice”.

Consequently, until now, Jakarta has been pursuing its foreign policy within the corridor of free-and-active principle. Former Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono stated during his inaugural speech 2009 that “.....Indonesia can exercise its foreign policy freely in all directions, having a

million friends and zero enemies” (Piccone & Yusman, 2014). Recent free-and-active foreign policy under the administration of President Joko Widodo is assumed to be more pragmatic and benefit-oriented as well as centered on identity as an archipelagic country which affects Jakarta’s more assertive response to Beijing’s claim in the South China Sea and illegal fishing committed by neighboring countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippine, and Vietnam (Lundry, 2018). This manifestation of foreign policy principle is in line with

Applying the free-and-active principle follows the definition given by Indonesia’s law Number 37 of 1999, which states that Indonesia has the freedom to determine its foreign policy without being interfered with by other countries, including China or the United States. This principle explains Indonesia’s independence in taking the hedging stance towards China despite both states’ close economic relationship. Meanwhile, the free-and-active principle also underpins Indonesia’s hedging approach in responding to the United States’ containment policy in the Asia-Pacific region, even though Indonesia-US security cooperation has witnessed a substantial improvement in recent years (Rachman, 2023).

The constitution and foreign policy principles adopted by Indonesia are relevant to why Jakarta prefers the hedging approach amid the escalating tension in the Asia-Pacific. This strategy, indeed, might provide opportunities for Indonesia to obtain more benefits for the unity and prosperity of the nation as mandated by its constitution and foreign policy principles. The constructivism school helps to comprehend the policy

choice of the Indonesian government in the face of the U.S.-China escalated confrontation, the basis for policy-making carried out by not only focusing on material calculations but also non-material aspects.

The Identity: Indonesia as the Leader of the Global South

Another crucial aspect that governs the dynamics of foreign policy-making is state identity. Constructivist thinkers interpret identity as states’ understanding of itself concerning the socialization process among states in the international system (Griffiths et al., 2009; Wendt, 1992). A state’s identity, as argued by constructivism, may influence the interests and policies of the state and be subject to change and able to change the international order through the socialization process among countries (Jepperson et al., 1996). For example, concerning the situation in the Asia-Pacific region, countries with democratic identities, such as Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other Western countries, tend to encourage the preservation of the current American-backed liberal order. In contrast, authoritarian countries such as China, Russia, and North Korea often issue controversial policies and movements to shift the order into the one that serves these countries’ interests (Hosoya, 2019).

In this respect, Indonesia’s standpoint in facing the current challenge imposed by competition between the existing world superpower, the United States, and the emerging power, China, is also influenced by Indonesia’s identity as the leader for the Global South countries, including its ASEAN counterparts. The

term global south covers countries that belong to regions other than Europe and North America with characteristics of low economic capacity and powerlessness in the international political system (Woon, 2016).

In the regional context, Indonesia is essential as one of ASEAN's founders, along with Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. Since then, Indonesia has been titled "the first among equals" of ASEAN, given the state's active role in enhancing ASEAN cooperation (Emmers, 2014; Rattanasevee, 2014). Indonesia, in particular, focuses on creating peace and stability in the Southeast Asia region, as visible in the vigorous efforts of Indonesian elites in fostering peace between Vietnam and Cambodia in the 70s and solving the Rohingya crisis through diplomacy and humanitarian assistance (Alexandra, 2017).

Moreover, the Indonesian government has always wanted to perform leadership roles globally. For example, during its G20 presidential term in 2022, Indonesia strongly advocated equitable access to the healthcare system in developing and underdeveloped countries (Naqsabandiyah et al., 2022). Regarding foreign aid and humanitarian assistance, Indonesia has also transformed into a donor country. According to the Ministry of Finance, the Indonesian government has granted IDR 2.15 billion to Ethiopia for drought relief (Ministry of Finance Republic of Indonesia, 2023). In addition, to show its commitment to assisting other developing and least-developed counterparts in the African region, the Indonesian government established the Indonesian Agency of International

Development (AID) in 2019 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

Indeed, Indonesia might not be the only country that can lead the global south, let alone other states such as India and China, which have higher GDP rates than Indonesia and also compete to obtain the status as the leader of the global south (Cave et al., 2023; IMF, 2023). However, compared to India and China, the exceptional characteristic of Indonesia's leadership is its consistent effort to urge other developing and least-developed countries to preserve their independence and autonomy in the face of major power rivalry.

This identity has been constructed by Indonesia since the early period of its emergence as a sovereign state by encouraging the implementation of the Asian-African Conference in 1955, which became the forerunner of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Through this conference and movement, Indonesia supported countries in Asia and Africa, the majority of which were former colonies and faced socio-economic issues, to fight against the colonialist-imperialist practices committed by the West. Indonesia enthusiastically invited these countries to become sovereign states and independent from Western aid, which was considered by the then-Indonesian president, Soekarno, as a new form of colonialism. "Colonialism also has its modern dress, in the form of economic control, intellectual control, actual physical control by a small but alien community within a nation" (Soekarno Opening Speech at the Asian-African Conference).

During the Cold War, Indonesia also continued to voice the notion of peace,

one of which was by promoting the ideology of *Pancasila* as emphasized by President Soekarno in his speech at the United Nations (UN) forum in 1960:

"I believe that there is a way out of this confrontation of ideologies. I believe that the way out lies in the universal application of —Pancha Shila. Who amongst you rejects Pancha Shila? Do the representatives of the great United States reject it? Do the representatives of the great USSR reject it? Or those of the United Kingdom, or Poland, or France or Czechoslovakia? Or, indeed, any of those who scent to have adopted static positions in this cold war of ideas and practices, who seek to remain rooted deep while the world is in flux?"

In the same way, to cope with contestation in the Asia Pacific region, Jakarta seems to carry a similar identity that motivates the government to provoke neutrality among other developing and underdeveloped countries. However, this attitude is more prominent in the Southeast Asian region where Indonesia continues to push ASEAN member states for unity and centrality in grappling with both the rising China and China- United States confrontation as accentuated by the Indonesian foreign minister, "ASEAN, Indonesia, wants to show to all that we are ready to be a partner. We do not want to get trapped by this rivalry" (Allard & Widiyanto, 2020). The ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP) is a regional architecture proposed by the Indonesian government to ensure ASEAN's role in addressing numerous issues in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly Southeast Asia. In other words, Indonesia does not want external powers to dominate policy-making in the region without considering the interests and principles of ASEAN countries.

"We, in ASEAN, are committed to continuously bolstering unity and solidarity as well as strengthening ASEAN's centrality in maintaining peace and stability in the region. ASEAN must not be an area of competition. It shall not become a proxy to any country, and we must respect international laws. So, we truly hope for cooperation and support from ASEAN's partners" (Aktas, 2023).

This foreign policy conducted by Indonesia illustrates how state identity is influenced as well as affects the international system through the socialization process. Indonesia's identity as the leader of the Global South was initially shaped by the two realities that took place during the Cold War, namely western colonialism continued to exist in Asia, Africa, and Latin America region despite most colonized countries being independent as well as superpowers rivalry. Afterward, this identity stimulated Indonesian elites to export their middle stance to other countries through the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which became a socialization instrument. Likewise, recent circumstance, when the world is again faced with major power contestation, is reviving Indonesia's identity as the global south leader that should promote peace, stability, and neutrality. Consequently, Indonesia endeavors to influence the policies of other countries in the Asia-Pacific, especially ASEAN, through the AOIP advocacy that has been carried out for several years until ASEAN officially adopted it in June 2019 (Thi Ha, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Although constructivism appeared later than other approaches, in many cases, constructivism can provide a

deeper analysis of the international relations phenomenon. In the context of Indonesia's posture amidst the increasing hostility among major powers in the Asia-Pacific region, this article highlights ideational factors covering principles, values, and identity that shape the country's policies.

This article found that the Indonesian government's policy of determining to be in the middle corridor instead of inclining towards certain blocs is primarily influenced not only by economic benefits but also by its foreign policy principles of free and active foreign policy. This principle represents the values of the Indonesian nation that are encapsulated in the *Pancasila*, which includes the values of religiosity, nationalism, humanity, deliberation, and justice. Also, it is undeniable that Indonesia's persistence in maintaining the principle of non-alignment was driven by its strong anti-colonialism feeling. The combination of *Pancasila* ideology, particularly religious values,

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with anti-colonialism attitudes fostered anti-China and anti-U.S. behavior among Indonesians, which refrained the Indonesian government from taking sides.

Therefore, this research confirms the constructivist perspective that policies and actions are influenced by and affect the situation in the international world in which the state lives. The hedging strategy shown by Indonesia in the recent era is not only shaped by internal and external non-material factors, but this research also underscores how Indonesia strives to transmit its attitude to ASEAN countries. More importantly, the dimension of fundamental values, foreign policy principle, and state's identity contribute to the establishment of the standard behavior of Indonesia in the international system which is promoting peace and impartiality.

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