

## Original Research Article

# Thinking the Unthinkable: Indonesia's Search for a Reliable Partnership with the US or China

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### ABSTRACT

The rise of China stipulates the changing of global architecture on power relationship. Many argue that China attempts to dethrone the United States as a single, unchallenged power in international relations. As this situation continues to develop, China seems to be unpredictable in exercising its foreign policy, specifically at the regional level of Asia Pacific. The uncertain circumstance and fear of losing its power, force the US to interfere the region with a noble motive of safeguarding the other states from Beijing's aggressive moves. Many countries builds strong connection with China to boost their economic development while at the same time trusting the US more than anyone else in this world for their security, including strategic military cooperation. Among many countries, Indonesia stands in that dilemmatic situation where she needs to capture all opportunities from her growing neighbour and accommodate her traditional security partner. This research aims to unveil Indonesia's preference on determining a reliable partner for its foreign policy given two available options of the US and China. If Indonesia, in the future when the regional rivalry intensifies, has to select one of them as its primary partner, who will Indonesia choose? This research argues that Indonesia will lean to the US in maintaining its security affairs in the region. This argument base on the findings that in traditional context, US has been very close to Indonesia and until today, its close ties remain. Second, that China's aggressive moves in the region impedes Indonesia to conduct positive relationship with China in strategic security context. This research applies positivist approach with qualitative methods in which data collection is conducted through literature review and observation.

*Keywords: Indonesian foreign policy, rising China, Asia Pacific security, the US*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global nature of international relations has changed, from the Middle East-security focus, such as terrorism and rebels, to the Asia Pacific region where many scholars, such as Hugh White (2012) and Evelyn Goh (2016), claim that the shifting is about the great power rivalry between the US and China. The shift begins with the phenomenon of rising China in terms of its economy and military capacity which turns out into a disaster to many Asian countries. Its rise has never been seen as something positive and supportive to the regional development, but rather a great menace to the neighbouring countries. Although China itself declares that its rise is purportedly to be peaceful, but none of its neighbours are in favour with the Beijing statement. As the result, many countries attempt to refuse China's hegemony in the region by posing an impediment to its developing economy and military sector through the welcoming gesture toward the US intervention in Asia Pacific's geopolitics.

The US involvement in the region is motivated by a noble purpose to secure the region from the insolent Chinese behaviour. However, it is not a simple noble motive of the US to travel far from home for about 8000 miles away. This is not the first time the US tries to interfere other states' business. Seems that if something gets abnormal by the US standard, the US had always been more than ready to jump into that situation. Just like a normal America when it tried to confront the USSR as its rival or the time the US invaded Middle East. Similar to this kind of behaviour, US rapprochement to Asia Pacific of course hides another reason which is obvious to global politics, to challenge China and to ensure that the global power primacy remains unchanged (Scott 2018: 20; Shambaugh 2018).

The interwoven of China-US relations in Asia Pacific changes global concern on international politics. As aforementioned, while in post-9/11 the US puts very high attention to Middle East even to risking its military overseas for years, recently the situation develops to give concern again over Asia Pacific (McDougall 2016: 38-39). This changing global situation places Asia Pacific, to be specific Southeast Asia, as the spotlight in international politics, attracting many countries to see at this region as well as to take advantage from this great power rivalry (Shambaugh 2018).

Not to mention Indonesia, a maritime country in Southeast Asia which traditionally bandwagon with the US in many ways though not as its natural allies. Examples such as Indonesia's response to the US-led Global War on Terror, regular joint military training and arms trade even military equipment grants are too obvious to deny Indonesia's closeness to the US. On the other side, the country also enjoys the economic miracle of China through trade and investment. Although in term of investment, China is not likely to be the largest investor in Indonesia, but to count trading and other economics activities together might bring China as the first Indonesia's economic partner (Anwar 2019: 145). Indonesia has no friend as close as the US in military and security sector, but also definitely has no best partner in the economy except China.

Benefits which Indonesia has taken from both US and China as above-mentioned, however, are not something taken for granted. Indonesia has been wrestling with this complex environment ever since the rivalry took place in the region. Indonesia needs to confront China in the maritime border dispute and suffers military embargo from the US as payoffs. None of these partnership relations are innately profitable to Indonesia at no cost. Free dinner in politics is a deceit. Looking at the positive side, Indonesia receives numerous advantages by cooperating with these two great powers, but what we sometimes neglect or prefer not to see is what sacrifice this country has been dealing with. This political environment requires Indonesia to play wisely, rowing a boat between two gigantic reefs,

trying to navigate the boat not to sink in the ocean. Yet, eventually, grasping all opportunities and gaining more benefits than losses are indispensable in politics.

Looking through the big picture of Asia Pacific region, does the rivalry posit challenge to Indonesia as a relatively middle power country? The answer is an absolute 'yes'. In this anarchic world, every great powers' political strategy means something to the rest of the world. Moreover, this rivalry could be worse once imbalance of power occurs in the region. As Kenneth Waltz (1979: 131) argues that imbalance of power is dangerous not only to the great powers, but also to weak states. Waltz's observation concludes that imbalance of power generates ambition of one state to expand its control and so possesses 'dangerously adventurous activity'. Therefore, for a middle power like Indonesia, it is necessary to maintain the status quo. However, the dynamic circumstance of Asia Pacific sometimes put weaker states in a most dilemmatic situation where they are implicitly required to choose between the two great powers. The real challenge is no longer about whether the US-China rivalry posit threat to Indonesia, but to question who would Indonesia choose to cooperate with?

The great power rivalry between the US and China puts Indonesia in a dilemmatic position to decide which one is more important to Indonesia as its partner. This paper would discuss the position of Indonesia between those two great powers by investigating a primary question of which state, China or the US, is more reliable to Indonesia as its partner? In response to this question, there would be different argumentative answers depending on how we interpret relations between Indonesia and those countries in particular partnership sectors. As it would be extensive to discuss, this essay would specify the discussion only to a strategic military partnership issue and left economic partnership untouched to minimise bias in proposing policy recommendation.

This essay argues that in the context of strategic military partnership, Indonesia convincingly put the US over China as its reliable partner in the international arena. In order to bring this argument, the essay would highlight two key points. First, that in many ways America has been Indonesia's most reliable partner in security, while China is perceived mostly as a threat rather than a plausible security partner. Second, it is nearly unthinkable for Indonesia to create such partnership with China due to its decisive policy over the specific South China Sea, and mainly on Asia region.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to deliver solid and credible research as well as to predict a plausible future, the use of theory is then very essential. The theory of neorealism might suit best to discuss our core argument as the theory comprehensively elaborate the very ground of state's behaviours: to gain relative benefit and unleash its truest potential power to cope with the notorious environment of world politics. Kenneth Waltz (1979) discovers that states tend to seek relative gain because of fear of losing other opportunities to achieve power. More fundamentally, Waltz concludes that international is anarchic, meaning that the nature of international structure is decentralized with no superior authority. This circumstance has been called as 'the politics in the absence of government' (Fox 1959: 53). His explanation on this theory lead to the conclusion that every single state, no matter what power they possess, need to think strategically in order to pursue their interest and unlock greater status, as well as to make sure that they are not trapped in this anarchic situation.

Serving as a grand theory, neorealism only reveals state behaviour on the surface, concisely explaining the nature of international relations and relationship model between states. As a grand theory, neorealism does not engage deeply into specific issue such as how middle

power countries exert their power in international structure or how conflict might escalate or de-escalate. It is the work of the concept as strands in theory. Concept helps us to understand the issue more comprehensively, not only in the nutshell like its grand theory.

To find who will Indonesia choose as major partner in strategic security realm, and to understand why Indonesia decided to do so, we need a more strategic concept to respond those queries. For this issue, investigation through the lens of alignment might deem appropriate. As suggested by E.J. Labs (1992: 390) that in an arena of great powers confrontation, middle power countries, or Labs refers as 'weak states', do have many viable options to select, and among many is balance and not fight.

Undoubtedly, this strategy seems to be the ultimate measure for middle powers to deal with the conflict among great powers. It is the first non-independent option middle powers tend to select amid great power rivalry (Labs 1992: 393), while the independent option is non-alignment is the top priority. However, this strategy will only come with one condition: the availability of opposing great power in the region (Walt 1987: 30). Essentially, the strategy enables middle powers to engage with aggressor's peer competitor, or simply called as ally. The ally plays as an umbrella providing extended protection to the weaker states. By nature, this option seems viable for less powerful states because it is the only way these states can survive amid the great power conflicts.

It seems contradictory if we look at the foundational writings on strategic approach in international relations, scholars unanimously agreed that weak states, or middle powers, would absolutely join the aggressor as their very best option, which later called as bandwagoning. However, this interpretation is a half-truth because middle powers would only consider bandwagoning as a last-resort strategy. Stephen Walt (1987) breaks out prerequisite for a state to choose bandwagon: the weaker state is geographically proximate with the aggressor, the aggregate power is available but not present nearby, and the aggressor display offensive behaviour. Conforming Walt argument, Jack Levy (1989: 231) also figures out that 'weaker states in the proximity of stronger states will do what is necessary to survive' which often end in bandwagoning. In this situation, they have no choice but concede to aggressor, because they are weak and isolated (Mearsheimer 2014: 163).

In strategic concept, alignment has various strands. It allows states to: (1) setup alliance of weak states, (2) declare allegiance to opposing power as a free-rider, and (3) join the opposing power and actively balancing aggressor. Among them, to be a free-rider is the best and less-risky strategy for weaker states. When weaker states join the coalition, their contribution might not count very significant and to buck-pass all the responsibility, including fighting in battle and military expenditure, to great power ally (Labs 1992: 320). As a free-rider, middle power countries benefitted from such model because powerless countries no need to respond directly to its aspiring hegemon neighbour and so let no considerable effect to their countries. But the question is, why do such powerless countries seek assistance oversea?

The answer lies in the balance of power theory where states believe that under alliance, domination of stronger power will be averted (Walt 1987: 18). Labs (1992: 388) found that weaker states with geographical proximity 'will carry a disproportionate burden of resisting the hegemon relative to more distant great powers'. This argument is originally rooted from the basic tenets of neorealism which argues that the imminent threat of a state is their neighbours (Waltz 1979). By this, to avoid escalating conflict, which if happen by any calculation middle powers will lose, thus taking opportunities from abroad. At the same time,

opposing great power gains recognition from the region and it means an endorsement to balance the aggressor.

In our discussion, let it be clear that the aggressor refers to China as the aspiring hegemon in Asia Pacific, while the US will be the foreigner who choose to challenge China. These two great powers rivalry generate what so called as the balance of power in Asia Pacific. Of course, Indonesia does not play a key role in the balance because she appears as the middle power country.

Research found that Indonesia, faced against Sino-US rivalry, will take course to lean on the US rather than China in terms of strategic military issue (Nabbs-Keller 2011; Laksmana 2017). To be specific, Nabbs-Keller (2011) discusses Indonesia-China relations within deeper analysis where she uncovers that Indonesia is very significant to China, *vice versa*, in economic sector. Albeit their close ties, Nabbs-Keller's research reveals that Indonesia does not fully trust China and will maintain good rhetorical relationship on public due to her immense benefit from China. To this point, Nabbs-Keller does not touch upon strategic military issue that Indonesia might experiencing between Sino-US rivalry.

Another best research is drawn by Evan Laksmana (2017), where he tries to incorporate the concept of 'Limited Alignment' from John Ciorciari (2010) and 'Omni-enmeshment' from Evelyn Goh (2008) into what he called 'Pragmatic Equidistance'. He argues that Indonesia is practicing 'free and active' foreign policy by tilting towards one great power (limited alignment), in this case for strategic security, and grasping economic opportunities from another without creating a confrontation between rivalling powers. This perhaps describes current Indonesian foreign policy, but somehow does not investigate further why Indonesia fall into the US for security and China for its economy.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research applies qualitative research methods through library research/literature review, documentary review, and actual observations. The positivist approach is employed in this article in which researcher sees international politics as a given phenomenon and qualitatively explore the case study without giving in intervention to the results of this article.

### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Indonesia Foreign Policy Update**

Before we proceed, it is imperative to discuss the root of Indonesian foreign policy. Indonesia has traditionally nurtured a unique foreign policy since the earlier era of its independence. Its natural foreign policy of 'free and active' enable the country to 'represent the authentic expression of Indonesia's foreign policy' (Leifer 1983: 38). Prime Minister Ali's achievement in managing this foreign policy was translated into the renowned Asian-African Conference in 1955. This model of foreign policy was echoed throughout the archipelago and constantly reproduced by Soekarno's successors to the current Jokowi's regime. Although Jokowi tends to recast Indonesian foreign policy to the importance of maritime axis as well as to take care of his domestic exigencies (see Rosyidin 2017), but the 'free and active' foreign policy remains unchanged. Jokowi and his foreign policy experts project Indonesian foreign policy for future architecture of Asia-Pacific rather than ASEAN because the region has the potential to give Indonesia new limits for its capability to be free and active (Weatherbee 2016: 17) between the US and China.

Indonesian 'free' foreign policy does not literally mean 'free' from external relations that forbids the country to cooperate with international actors, but indeed, it provides 'a maximum

freedom of choice and freedom of action' (Sukma 1995: 315). Michael Leifer (1983: 28) suggests that even in the environment of 'free and active' foreign policy, Indonesia was progressive enough to maintain relations with China and Soviet Union which demonstrated the absence of non-alignment movement in the earlier of its independence. Leifer observation could be interpreted to Sukma's translation of 'free and active' foreign policy, which Indonesia at that time, though formally not aligning with any great powers, still could exercise its foreign policy independently in pursuant of its domestic interest. Until present, Indonesia manages distant relations with Beijing and Washington cautiously, without seeking too close relations with both powers (shambaugh 2018: 102).

The 'free and active' foreign policy was projected to transform Indonesia into a great power, or at least a new emerging power, because this model of foreign policy enable Indonesia to jump in to many partnerships regardless their incompatible interest with other Indonesia's partner. But does it work well? The general answer is yes, this foreign policy delivers Indonesia as one of the global emerging power. Meaning that Indonesia has reputable position in global arena. But of course, still weak enough to challenge China alone.

However, the power that Indonesia possesses contrast to other emerging powers like Brazil or India. It is very unlikely for Indonesia to channel its foreign policy through material powers such as military and economy. Santikajaya (2016) argues that Indonesia's material powers have not expanded as much as the other emerging powers. However, he continues to display Indonesia's greatest power which lies in its soft-power diplomacy. Indonesia's lack of material powers forces the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to adjust its foreign policy by maximizing its 'free and active' model through the active engagement in various international arena. As the result, Indonesia has successfully maintained its reputation in global arena through this alternative approach.

The development of recent Indonesian foreign policy is reflected through many Indonesia engagement in various international arena. From the very specific multilateral communities such as MIST (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, and Turkey), the Next-11 and CIVETS (Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey, and South Africa) to the very prestige forum of G20. In some venues, Indonesia even takes a more significant role, not only as a participating country but also actively occupying strategic position. For instance, is the most recent Indonesia's assignment as one of UNSC non-permanent member for the period 2019-2020. Not only supportive to international arena, Indonesia also contribute to the development of United Nations through constructive critics like what President Yudhoyono had performed in front of the UN-General Assembly in 2012 where he deliberately call for reform in UNSC (Rostiyani 2012). Another great space for Indonesia to play key role in international arena is the ability of Indonesia to bridge Muslim and Western world due to its large Muslim population intertwined with western style democracy (Sukma, 2012: p.81). With this model of foreign policy, President Yudhoyono believes that Indonesia sought to be part of the solution of global problem (Poole, 2015: p.159).

#### **4.2 Sailing in Two Oceans?**

As a middle country, Indonesia has no strong power relative to the US and China in any ways. However, at the global stage, Indonesia sometimes reckoned as a vocal state speaking out about global injustice, peace, and human security throughout various multilateral spaces. Muhammad Rosyidin (2017) discovers that Indonesia, under President Joko Widodo, has no interest in pursuing great power status. This argument rooted from the fact that Indonesia prefers to achieve domestic development through infrastructure and economy. As the result, Indonesia is suffering the lack of material power in the context of

international relations, such as military and economy. This less material power push Indonesia to cooperate with others, including great powers in the midst of their rivalry.

Therefore, Indonesia in strategic military affairs is allowed to side with the US even not in a formal alliance form. The objective is to ensure that the US would never intervene Indonesia's policy-making process as well as to manage good relation with other counterparts such as China in this current age. Our first argument leads to the fact that there are many examples on both how Indonesia demands assistance from the US and how the US tied Indonesia up under its feet. Strategic cooperation with the US is not only about an explicit partnership that involves a military approach to the issue, but also in a diplomatic space where the US plays a vital role to set the talks and create a foundation for the regional institution. The Indo-Pacific Rim cooperation framework was initiated by the regional US allies of Australia, Japan, and India where the US placed as both intellectual mastermind and supporter for this regime (Willis 2016). The objective is to develop regional security and diplomatic relations for the regional group of democracies as well as to deter China's assertive moves in the region (Swaine 2018).

Indonesia, from the era of Minister Marty Natalegawa has made meaningful efforts to the creation of this regional architecture (see Cook 2018) as Marty himself sees Indo-Pacific as the future of Indonesia. His vision is accomplished through the appointment of Indonesia as the chair of IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association). This foreign policy continues to the current Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi who recently emphasise the shift of Indonesian foreign policy to the Indo-Pacific by promoting regional stability and peace in the region (Sheany 2018) rather than having a high-profile global reputation. This projection of foreign policy shift tells that Indonesia would always siding with the US in security issues. Indonesia ties to the US is so apparent in strategic affairs and prognosis will continue as it is.

Not only in normative diplomatic venues but the United States rapprochement to Indonesia is also implemented through practical security issues. Ann Murphy (2010) suggests that the US strategic partnership toward Indonesia is beyond any other country that Indonesia has received from, it includes traditional security threats of terrorism, piracy, security dialogue and training, military procurement as well as the most important thing for archipelagic countries, a maritime security framework. In the context of combatting terrorism and maritime piracy, the US has enormously assisted Indonesia through the creation of task forces as well as designing a security framework for future mitigation. Recorded \$6.65 million was flown to Indonesia in 2011 under the Congressional budget request for counter-terrorism program across Indonesia as well as providing technical assistance for cybersecurity expertise to monitor terrorist activities, besides the joint military training and assistance for creating Detachment 88 anti-terror (Murphy 2010: 377). While in piracy issue, the US has made many efforts to assist Indonesia, and its trilateral regional body of anti-piracy in Malacca Strait, from military training to the deployment of the US maritime patrol to the region (see Percival 2005).

Despite non-traditional security issues that Indonesia has long enjoyed from the US, traditional security issues attract the US intention even more compelling. In 2012, the US has generously granted 24 F16 aircrafts (Purwanto, 2012) worth \$750 million. For the record, Indonesia even not one of US' ally. Their tight relationship continues to grow with the US persistent effort to conduct joint military trainings with Indonesia. This joint military training somehow common in US-Indonesia relations since they have conducted joint training regularly. In 2022, US-Indonesia joint military training even more immense with considerable number of personnel involved, not only from US and Indonesia, but also from neighbouring countries. Approximately 5000 personnel were invited to what so called as 'Super Garuda Shield' joint military training (Jakarta Post, 2022). Super Garuda Shield yet to

become largest US-led annual military exercise, Indonesia has participated Cobra Gold, the largest exercise of its kind in Asia Pacific (Gill, Goh, & Huang 2016: 7).

Although US-Indonesia relations are close enough, critics and negative perceptions have been addressed to the Indonesia-America security relations. The dynamics have occurred even before Reformasi, under Soekarno and Soeharto presidencies. One of the most notable critical relations was Washington's favour for West Irian independence along with its Australian allies that significantly undermine both Soekarno and Indonesian nationalism (Roadnight 2002: 172). Poor relations between those countries continue to the Soeharto regime which Daniel Novotny (2010: 103) characterises as ambivalent relations due to Soeharto's subjective unfavourableness to the US. Even to the situation between Trump and Jokowi on the mismatch over the maintenance of the South China Sea where the US insists Indonesia to be the claimant state against the Jakarta's lenient behaviour towards its North Natuna Sea (Izuddin 2018). Including, the long-lasting US embargo that aggravates TNI's capability concerning weaponry infrastructure (Gindarsah & Priamarizki 2015: 141).

Even though relations are up and down, but the US still becomes the more important partner for Indonesia in strategic issues compare to China which security cooperation had just developed recently in 2005 but only remains as MoU with no real practical activities, so it is considered as unprosperous and unsmooth relations (Fitriani 2018: 395). On the other side, Roy (2005: 317) founds that Indonesia, especially its military officers, is wary of China's power and labelled China as 'Indonesia's most likely military threat' which Smith (2003: 7) argues that China's invasion to Indonesia is very possible. Very unlikely to have a constructive security partnership within the current political climate.

Another evidence was drawn over the 2008 Indonesia-China commitment to boost up their military partnership through joint production of military vehicles and collaborative joint military training (Dewabrata 2008) but found unsuccessful up until 2017 (Fitriani 2018: 396). Perhaps, the reason why all Chinese-related security cooperation ineffectual is because what Novotny (2010: 174-175) writes as the negative perception among the elites, not only within military officials. Novotny claims that this prejudice rooted from the Chinese channelled communist revolution under PKI which deteriorate its image among Indonesians due to the mass atrocities they produce. The elites' perceptions matter in foreign policy as one of determining factor in shaping foreign policy, although it seems very subjective (Wish 1980). This subjective prejudice contributes to the exacerbation of Indonesia-China relations in strategic military affairs.

The fragility of Indonesia-China relations on the security sector above support our second argument of the nearly impossible relations for such partnership. As aforementioned, although many attempts have been made to restore the relations, most fails to operate effectively due to perceptions rooted from historical conspiracy and the fact that the US has been very dominant in this sector for many years. Additionally, we have to underline the geopolitical architecture that constrains Indonesia's relation with China. It is China, not the US, that has shared-maritime border with Indonesia. China's geographical proximity to Indonesia creates some border disputes, but not only border disputes, it is also China's very progressive military improvement that intimidates Southeast Asian countries (Goh 2008; Acharya 2014), including Indonesia. While on the other side, the US has a reliable reputation with no imminent threat. Therefore, China becomes less attractive for Indonesia to build security partnership.

Apart from that issue, what makes the US more critical to Indonesia is because of China's assertive policy towards the South China Sea. As Izuddin (2018) argues above that Indonesia, perhaps along with other Southeast Asian claimant states, is too calm in

responding China's offensive policy in Natuna Sea. Not only Indonesia, even the Philippine would prefer the status quo and advance its economic cooperation with China rather than exaggerating their maritime disputes. Nonetheless, the sobriety of Indonesia to maintain a good relationship with China does not mean that the country is bowing for China. Indonesia, in response to this, seeks the US bilateral alliances and its regional military presence to keep China in check (Gindarsah & Priamarizki 2015: 137). Jakarta makes use of the US Defence Secretary, Jim Mattis, visit to Indonesia in 2018 and implicitly agree on the point that Indonesia should cautiously play as claimant state in order to have military embargo towards its Kopassus lifted (Stewart & Da Costa 2018).

Not only as a claimant state, it is presumably that Indonesia also play as a security balancer against China under the US extended security project in Asia Pacific, and so the US-Indonesia security partnership will continue to develop. In his visit, Mattis also highlights Indonesia significance as 'a geographic and diplomatic fulcrum for the Indo-Pacific region', which signal US support for Indonesian claim on Natuna waters, waters that is on dispute with China (Scott 2018: 23-24). Indonesia's firm attribution to Natuna waters implied from the fact that Indonesia considers taking Natuna dispute to international court of arbitration if bilateral diplomatic channel fails to achieve solution (Gill, Goh, & Huang 2016: 10)

China's fierce policy in the South China Sea inadvertently advancing Indonesia-America relation on the security issue. The embargo lift could improve TNI's capacity in maintaining Indonesian national territory with the assistance of the US through an intensive joint program. In addition, Gindarsah & Priamarizki (2015) argue that this policy would enhance arms trade and technological exchanges with the US, as its traditional allies, for its military modernisation policy.

#### **4.3 Stranded in the West Shore: A Prognosis**

Undeniably, great power rivalry in Asia Pacific manufactures a new architecture for both the region and the world. It is fascinating to witness growing China in Asia, but it also suffocating to be its neighbours. However, countries in this region deliberately eager to replace Western-led world into Eastern/Asian-led world, but indeed, they still insist the US presence to contain China's aggressive moves, particularly in South China Sea dispute. Of course each state would deliver a different response toward this environment, but the above statement is a generic view among many Asian countries. Including Indonesia.

The current environment in Asia Pacific restraints Indonesia from taking full advantages from each great power. Therefore, Indonesia needs to take care of its step before concluding a decision. As it seen earlier, the US seems to be the most reliable partner for Indonesia in the strategic military context. At least at this very present time. This preference must be preserved for the few coming years. It is very essential for Indonesia to foster its security partnership with the US, along with other Asian countries, to manage Beijing foreign policy. Beside, Indonesia would never want to be an alien in the region, leaving herself alone siding with China while the rest of Asia welcome the US. Because traditionally, it is the US that has been either allies or security partner to many Asian countries such as the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea and Japan (Christensen 2006, p. 98), not to mention Taiwan and Hong Kong.

At the end, even in a longer term, Indonesia would and should maintain its relations in strategic military affairs with the US only and keeping hands off from China for this partnership. As this is the ultimate source of security assurance for Indonesia, the situation might develop to a more serious relationship, sort of like a semi-alliance where the US at

certain circumstances is allowed to assist Indonesia against China's threat or aggressive moves overseas.

Beside it is very hard for Indonesia to shift its strategic security affairs to alternate powers, the US presence in Asia also serve as a driving factor that attract many Asian countries to join with. Indonesia behaviour towards America is also driven by the persistent effort of the US to dominate security structure in Asia under its post-war strategy (Cha 2010, p. 158). In fact, it is the US that continuously supplies immense security assurance in Asia to secure its power in global politics by containing, firstly the Soviet, and now China. Largely, the motive is crystal clear to many scholars, from anti-communist sentiment to the rising power containment.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

It is relevant to say that the United States plays more constructive roles in military and strategic security affairs for Indonesia compare to China. This situation leads the US becoming the more, possibly the most, important security partner for Indonesia. Firstly, because we have seen in many ways that the US traditionally contributes positively to the management of Indonesia's strategic affairs rather than China. Efforts have been made including joint forces, joint military training, arms trade, and regional security framework. Although they are not always in the same shoes, the US' contribution to Indonesia's security affairs is enormously beyond compare to other countries. The circumstance for Indonesia to lean with the US also underpinned by the fact of China's geographical proximity, and more horrifying, is its rapid development of huge military capacity which been deployed in the South China Sea maritime dispute. For the last reason, it is unquestionably imperative for Indonesia to stay away from China and request the US to back up for regional balance. Therefore, bilateral security ties with the US are compulsive.

However, the conclusive arguments presented are based on historical experience and current phenomena which Indonesia undergoes. Projection in this article is forecasted through the study of given situations, both historical and present, and as observed, it continues to do so. Yet, international politics is dynamic, and changes are possibly to occur. If then situation develops uncertain, preferred option that previously argued in this research might not be adamant and shift scenario toward other great powers is plausible, although the chance is nearly unthinkable.

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