

Amidst China's Assertiveness and Indonesia's Domestic Bureaucratic Politics: The Trajectory of Indonesia's Response to the South China Sea Dispute under Yudhoyono and Jokowi

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Abstract

This article explains how China's increased assertiveness in recent decades and the bureaucratic politics inside Indonesian government institutions have impacted Indonesia's response to the South China Sea dispute. Different from what others have found, this article will not discuss whether Indonesia's response is proper in dealing with China's assertiveness or vice versa. Instead, by applying the theory of Neoclassical Realism which incorporates the variables of external pressure and domestic politics, this article aspires to compare Indonesia's response under the leadership of Yudhoyono and Jokowi. Conducting a comparative analysis serves as a means to encapsulate and comprehend the trajectory of Indonesia's responses to the South China Sea dispute. Moreover, employing a qualitative descriptive research methodology, this study revealed that the assertive stance of China and Indonesia's bureaucratic politics have influenced variations in the extent to which Indonesia employs multilateral and unilateral strategies in its response during the leaderships of Yudhoyono and Jokowi. Based on these findings, this article also formulates a model explaining Indonesia's response to the South China Sea dispute.

Keywords: China's assertiveness, domestic bureaucratic politics, Indonesia, response, the South China Sea dispute.

Abstrak

Artikel ini berupaya menjelaskan bagaimana peningkatan asertivitas Tiongkok dalam beberapa dekade terakhir dan politik birokrasi di dalam tubuh pemerintahan Indonesia telah mempengaruhi respons Indonesia terhadap sengketa Laut Cina Selatan. Berbeda dari temuan-temuan sebelumnya, artikel ini tidak akan membahas apakah tanggapan Indonesia tepat dalam menghadapi asertivitas Tiongkok atau sebaliknya. Dengan menerapkan teori Realisme Neoklasik yang menggabungkan variabel tekanan eksternal dan politik domestik, artikel ini bertujuan untuk membandingkan respons Indonesia di bawah kepemimpinan Yudhoyono dan Jokowi. Analisis komparatif dalam artikel ini berfungsi untuk merangkum dan memahami arah respons Indonesia terhadap sengketa Laut Cina Selatan. Selain itu, dengan menggunakan metodologi penelitian deskriptif kualitatif, studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa asertivitas Tiongkok dan politik birokrasi di tubuh pemerintahan Indonesia telah mempengaruhi variasi dalam sejauh mana Indonesia menggunakan strategi multilateral dan unilateral dalam tanggapannya selama kepemimpinan Yudhoyono dan Jokowi. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, artikel ini juga berupaya merumuskan model yang menjelaskan respons Indonesia terhadap sengketa Laut Cina Selatan.

Kata kunci: asertivitas Tiongkok, politik birokrasi domestik, Indonesia, respon, sengketa Laut Cina Selatan

Introduction

The discussions regarding Indonesia's response to the South China Sea (SCS) dispute have been widely carried out by pundits and scholars. They mainly argue that Indonesia's response to the conflict has been steadily consistent from the beginning of the conflict, despite several regime changes (see, Aplianta, 2015; McRae, 2019). The consistency of Indonesia's response is the result of Indonesia's well-established free and active (*bebas-aktif*) foreign policy doctrine and the belief that Indonesia's foreign policy affairs are "autonomous of domestic political struggles" (McRae, 2019). In response, this article aspires to challenge the dominance of this literature by employing the tradition of neo-classical realist theory, as shown by several of Indonesia's security observers and eventually found the dynamics of response (Laksmna, 2016; Sari, 2021; Sebastian & Chen, 2021; Syailendra, 2017).

While the employment of neo-classical realism has been intensively conducted, researchers are entering a new debate: how proper is Indonesia's response? Observing two significant variables: the increase in China's aggressiveness and Indonesia's bureaucratic politics, Laksmna (2016) posits that Indonesia's response to the SCS dispute is "under-balancing" because there are significant conflicts of interest among Indonesia's government officials. Since the conflicts have not been properly managed due to several factors, including President Joko Widodo's (Jokowi) lack of interest in foreign policy issues, Indonesia's response needs to be more robust and pathetic. From a different point of view, Syailendra (2017) argues that Indonesia's response is "non-balancing" with the increasing pressure from China in the SCS dispute. This argument comes from the fact that several agencies in Indonesia's maritime affairs, including key individuals in the government, have competing views and interests in responding to China's increasing pressure. Because this condition affects Indonesia's foreign policy, citing Schweller's lexicon, the "threat" from China becomes "unanswered" (Schweller, 2004). In contrast to Syailendra's argument, Sari (2021) posits that during the first

and the second terms of Jokowi's presidency, Indonesia's response to the Chinese activities in the SCS dispute is modestly appropriate. Indonesia's policymakers have been able to understand China better and thus successfully formulate a "prudent strategy".

Regardless of the significant contribution of those findings, as mentioned earlier, this article does not seek to discuss the appropriateness of Indonesia's response. Instead, it aims to depict and explain its trajectory. Employing neo-classical realism, with its two crucial variables of external pressure and domestic politics (Rose, 1998; Wicławski, 2017), this article argues that there have been intensive interactions between these two variables, which in turn influence Indonesia's behaviour in the SCS dispute, primarily in the time of President Yudhoyono and Jokowi's presidency. Connecting to the theory, this article analyses China's assertiveness and Indonesia's bureaucratic politics as the subjects of analysis. The consideration in operating these two subjects is not recklessly baseless: China's activities in the SCS dispute have been evolving into a certain degree of threatening acts (Chang, 2012; Darmawan, 2018; Yahuda, 2013), and Indonesia's 1998 *Reformasi* indeed has changed the way Indonesia's foreign policy is formulated and evaluated due to the increasing participation of institutions and bureaucrats (Anwar, 2010; Gindarsah, 2012; Nabbs-Keller, 2013). In short, this article is not concerned with the normative endpoint of the response; rather, it discusses the building blocks of the response: its process.

Applying qualitative descriptive approach, this research collects both primary and secondary data: ranging from Indonesian government officials' speech and all works of literature relating to the same topics. The structure of this article is as follows: firstly, it explains the history of Indonesia's approach on the SCS dispute. Secondly, it traces the escalation of China's assertiveness and the competition between policymakers impacting Indonesia's response to the SCS dispute during the Yudhoyono and Jokowi administrations. Thirdly, we examine the interaction between

these two subjects to illustrate that they are, in essence, interwoven to shape foreign policy. In the end, this article presents a matrix to explain the trajectory of Indonesia's response to the SCS dispute under the two presidencies.

Theoretical Framework

Neoclassical Realism

To understand and trace how a foreign policy is systematically shaped, neoclassical realism incorporates external and internal variables of the states in its analytical framework. According to this theory, the international system (external variables) is the leading force in formulating foreign policy (Rose, 1998). Even so, this existing power will not necessarily drive a country's foreign policy: the international structure is still transmitted first into complex domestic politics for further process. Thus, despite the international system's pressure having the power to steer foreign policy, domestic politics also plays a crucial role in translating "the pressure" and choosing what response a state should take.

As neoclassical realism applies a multilevel approach, this theory constitutes the variable of systemic pressure as an independent variable and domestic politics as an intervening variable. The idea of systemic pressure treated as an independent variable comes from the tradition of structural realism, which implies that the international system's distribution of power determines a state's foreign policy (Wicłowski, 2017). However, neoclassical realists also recognise that structural realism, with its core predictability, has a weakness in explaining state-specific behaviour, such as why two states may respond differently to the same international threat (Rose, 1998). Being aware of that deficiency, neoclassical realists "borrow explanatory power from classical realism and apply some intervening variables at the unit level to mediate the connection between the international system and state behaviour" (He, 2008).

It is essential to know that despite neoclassical realists having incorporated the

domestic with external consideration in its analytical framework, there is no academic consensus regarding which intervening variables from the unit level should be considered and how to do it. Thus, it is a privilege for scholars to choose various "transmission belts from the unit level as causal mechanisms to connect system effects and policy decisions" (He, 2008). This flexibility gives researchers advantages since they could freely utilise the most suitable "transmission belt" on specific issues and scope conditions impacting foreign policy decisions. He (2008), for example, analyses post-reform Indonesian foreign policy from three different presidents using the international pressure-political legitimacy model. In analysing Indonesia's foreign policy towards China, apart from firstly considering the increasing threat from that country, Syailendra (2017) argues that bureaucratic politics is a crucial determinant impacting Indonesia's response, while Arif (2021) posits that Jokowi's personality is more significant than bureaucratic politics.

The decision of this article to use neoclassical realism theory is based on a solid consideration: Indonesia's foreign policy works of literature are dominated by the leader-centric approach, which primarily emphasises analysing the individuality of presidents and its implications to the foreign policy output (Fionna, Negara, & Simandjuntak, 2019; Rosyidin, 2017; Weatherbee, 2016b). Thus, according to this tradition of research, if we want to investigate Indonesia's response to the SCS dispute, we must deeply understand the presidents' characters and ignore the external force. This tradition, however, is problematic since it would easily undermine the role of international system's pressure in coercing a state to certainly behave, specifically in foreign policy where comprehensive calculation should be taken into account. Hence, in the context of the SCS dispute, China's assertive pressure on Indonesia could not be abandoned at bay since the degree of the pressure has been arguably intimidating since the 2010s (Johnston, 2013; Sinaga, 2016; Swaine, 2010; Yahuda, 2013).

Aside from taking the variable of external pressure seriously, domestic political struggles

are also crucial to pay attention to. After the longstanding Soeharto's authoritarian regime fell, Indonesia entered a fundamentally new phase of the social and political landscape where the central governmental institution became restructured, affecting the transfer of political power vertically and horizontally. In the external relation context, the 1998 *Reformasi* has been responsible for paving the way for various institutions and bureaucrats to be critically involved in foreign policy making (Anwar, 2010; Dosch, 2006; Gindarsah, 2012; Wirajuda, 2014). Bearing that centralistic power had been unrolled, the participation of bureaucrats outside the Indonesian armed forces in decision-making has created competition among them. This practice also occurs in Indonesia-China relations, where Indonesian policymakers have different interests and aspirations (Connelly, 2016; Farneubun, 2021; Laksmana, 2016; Lim, Li, & Syailendra, 2021; Syailendra, 2017).

To conclude, the explanation above clearly indicates that the utilisation of neoclassical realism theory has its merit. This research illustrates the interactions between China's assertiveness and Indonesia's bureaucratic politics as the external and domestic determinants impacting Indonesia's response to the SCS dispute. Before further exploring those dynamics, tracing the SCS conflict's development is also essential in understanding why Indonesia is eventually pulled into the imbroglio.

Discussion

Indonesia and the SCS Dispute: A History of Multilateralism

For decades, the South China Sea (SCS) has been a hotspot for conflicts of interest among several countries worldwide. This ongoing regional security concern, sparked by China's unilateral claim in 1950s, extends into the territorial waters of the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia. Without a permanent and binding resolution, the risk of territorial disputes remains significant, posing a threat to the regional stability (Kipgen, 2018).

Analysts give reasons why this conflict could occur. One of the most frequently used references is the reason for the economic interest in the region, given the abundance of natural resources. According to the Council for Foreign Relations (CFR), the SCS contains about 900 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Moreover, the American Security Project states that gas reserves in the SCS reach 266 trillion cubic feet and account for 60%-70% of the total hydrocarbon reserves of the ocean area and it contains 7.7 billion barrels of oil reserves (Arbar, 2020).

Due to the proximity of the affected areas to Indonesia's territorial waters, Indonesia started responding the SCS dispute in the 1980s, fearing that regional wars could easily occur and impact Indonesia's domestic security (Syailendra, 2017). During this era, there were at least two main domestic actors with differing opinions in responding to China's actions in the SCS: the Indonesian Military or ABRI and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). While ABRI emphasised a tough approach due to concerns about strained relations with China following the 1965 tragedy, the Indonesian MoFA sought accommodation and a diplomatic approach (Aplianta, 2015).

In addressing the conflict, it seems that Indonesia later leaned towards a diplomatic approach and decided to minimise the use of a tougher stance, as advocated by ABRI. This is evident in Indonesia's initiation of workshops facilitated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), creating a platform for disputing countries to alleviate tensions and seeking collaborative resolutions. Despite ABRI once conducted a military drill in 1996 to respond China's map claiming Natuna's waters, Indonesia was fully aware that excessive use of military deterrence could only lead to "inevitable consequences". Furthermore, the newly formed relationship after the two-decade Indonesia-China diplomatic freeze also needed to be maintained due to its fragility. Hence, under President Soeharto's leadership, the country opted to prioritise inclusivity, offering a workshop as a platform for disputing countries to express their views (Aplianta, 2015).

While Indonesia is active in the dispute settlement, Indonesia's position is non-claimant. With that position, Indonesia took on an important role in efforts to de-escalate conflict tensions through its multilateral initiatives. The workshops initiated by Indonesian MoFA as mentioned earlier, for example, have been held annually and were considered to be successful. After covering the foundational aspects of collaboration in the initial three workshops, the discussions shifted towards more specific topics. As a result, several aspects were agreed upon and subsequently implemented to foster cooperative efforts among the disputing parties (Aplianta, 2015).

In addition to workshops, Indonesia also pursued a "doughnut diplomacy" initiative in 1994. Orchestrated by senior diplomat Hasjim Djalal, he embarked on a series of visits to ASEAN member countries. During these visits, he proposed a collaborative development project in the central region of the SCS, encompassing numerous islands. Despite this proposal was rejected by ASEAN countries, it showed Indonesia's consistency in upholding multilateralism as a means of conflict settlement (Aplianta, 2015). Building upon Indonesia's history of multilateral engagement in the SCS dispute, the following section will delve into the evolution of this approach over time, particularly during the administrations of Yudhoyono and Jokowi.

China's Assertiveness and Indonesia's Bureaucratic Politics under Yudhoyono

The Rise of the Threat (2009-2012)

In the second term of Yudhoyono's leadership, observers witnessed how China began to show its assertive attitude (Johnston, 2013; Swaine, 2010). In this regard, Johnston (2013) defines assertive action in international politics as "a form of assertive diplomacy that explicitly threatens to impose costs on another actor that are clearly higher than before". According to Yahuda (2013), one indicator of China's assertiveness is the expansion of China's national interests to control the surrounding maritime domains and

sea trade routes. Accompanied by extraordinary growth in military and economic strength, China started to be increasingly confident of dominating the SCS in the 2010s: in May and June 2010, for example, China committed two violations of Indonesia's EEZ and its fishing vessels were arrested by Indonesian authorities (CSIS, 2021).

Amidst this increasing assertiveness, Indonesia tried to escalate its active role in multilateral efforts to redeem the dispute. In 2011, for example, Indonesia intensively lobbied ASEAN member states and China to implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) during the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) with China. Indonesia, which at that time was the Chairman of ASEAN, urged its member states to continue discussions on guidelines for implementing the DOC (Laksmana, 2019). This effort was successful with the approval of the establishment of four committees for the implementation of the DOC in January 2012. Subsequently, ASEAN and China had discussed the establishment of a Code of Conduct (COC) as a continuation of the DOC. Unfortunately, in discussing the COC, China avoided joining the conversation and remained determined to discuss the DOC. The discussion on COC stopped when ASEAN leadership came under Cambodia, replacing Indonesia.

Under the chairmanship of Cambodia, ASEAN is increasingly divided in dealing with China over the SCS dispute. In July 2012, the AMM failed to produce a joint communique for the first time of ASEAN's history. Hor Nom Hong, Cambodia's foreign minister, concluded that the inclusion of the SCS issue in the joint statement has the potential to increase tensions because there is an intention from member states to be more specific with the naming of the disputed territory (Mogato, Martina, & Blanchard, 2016). Due to this position, Cambodia faced criticism as numerous ASEAN member nations were dissatisfied with the country's leadership. The Philippines and Cambodia blamed each other for the failure to reach a consensus on a joint statement. Recognising the risk of increased divisions

within ASEAN, Marty Natalegawa engaged in two days of shuttle diplomacy, visiting Manila, Hanoi, Bangkok, Phnom Penh, and Singapore, to ease tensions.

In addition to its multilateral efforts, Indonesia also pursued unilateral policies. In 2009, for example, when China sent a nine-dash line map document to the United Nations (UN), Indonesia submitted a protest to the UN through a *note verbale* in 2010. It asked about the legality of the document. The Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam also initiated this protest. Moreover, Indonesia also strengthened the defence infrastructure in Natuna and military exercises in the region. Indonesia held joint exercises in 2008 in several areas bordering or close to the SCS: Batam Island, Natuna Islands, waters near the Riau archipelago, Singkawang, and the Makassar Strait, and the Sangatta archipelago. This joint exercise involves more than 30,000 troops and is based on a scenario of a maritime invasion by a nation called “Sonora” (Laksmana, 2019).

The Anger in the Military Bodies (2013-2014)

At the end of President Yudhoyono’s term, Indonesia faced internal bureaucratic tensions on how to respond to China’s assertiveness. In 2014, for example, Indonesia’s Military Commander General Moeldoko wrote an opinion for the Wall Street Journal about the condition of the SCS dispute. Entitled “China’s Dismaying New Claims in the South China Sea”, Moeldoko stated that Indonesia would “strengthen its military power in the Natuna Islands” as Beijing allows it to make claims in the region (Moeldoko, 2014). At the same time, First Marshal Fahru Zaini Isnanto said that “China has arbitrarily claimed the Natuna waters as their territory and is not transparent about the coordinates entered into their map. The new map has even been included in the new passports of Chinese citizens.” Contrary to these official statements, on March 18, 2014, Minister of Foreign Affairs Marty Natalegawa responded by stating that there were no territorial disputes between Indonesia and China. Instead,

he emphasized that the two countries were engaged in cooperation in the maritime sector. (Syailendra, 2017).

Observers took note when the Indonesian military stated that China had asserted claims over Indonesian waters. Murphy (2014), for example, argues that it is a sign that there is anger in the military towards China’s activities in the SCS, and there is a possibility that Indonesia will join directly in the dispute—not just as a mediator. Furthermore, this stance also shows a distinction in the military’s attitude, which emphasises the need for a strong response. It is a stark contrast to the attitude of the civil bureaucrats, as represented by Indonesian MoFA, who prioritise dialogue and political strategy—by not recognising the SCS as a dispute between Indonesia and China.

In line with the anger of Indonesia’s military bodies, Indonesia then held the Naval Komodo Exercise in 2014. According to a senior Indonesian Navy official, Amarulla Octavian, the holding of this exercise was aimed at “[strengthening] the capability of the Navy in handling disasters. However, we also pay attention to China’s aggressiveness in entering the Natuna region” (Nabbs-Keller, 2014). Even though the planning for this joint exercise received resistance from the Indonesian MoFA for fear that it might undermine the *bebas-aktif* foreign policy doctrine, the Komodo Naval Exercise was still conducted, and it involved around 4,800 Indonesian Navy personnel and 27 warships (Wenas Inkiriwang, 2021).

Bureaucratic divisions indeed coloured Indonesia’s attitude towards China’s activities in the SCS during the final period of President Yudhoyono’s leadership. Nonetheless, Indonesia continued to pursue multilateralism as the main instrument. In its role as a conflict mediator, Indonesia consistently utilised multilateral approach through ASEAN-centered forums, upholding dialogue and inclusivity, and sought to realise COC as soon as possible.

The decision above is reasonable: China’s violations in Indonesia’s EEZ in this period was not higher than 2009-2012 (see Figure 2) and Indonesia’s response to the SCS dispute is part of a broader policy concerning Indonesia’s

relationship with China. While Yudhoyono's foreign policy credo was "a million friends, zero enemies," and he consistently emphasised stability within his cabinet, the president was also surrounded by ministers and bureaucrats who sought collaborative and mutually beneficial cooperation with China. For example, Farneubun (2021) explains that Indonesia's success under Yudhoyono in transforming the Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2005 into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2013 was substantially influenced by "key bureaucratic actors" who had a positive perception of "China's role in international affairs." They were highly engaged in policy advocacy for fostering strategic cooperation with China, actively participating in bilateral meetings with Chinese officials and business groups (Farneubun, 2018). These key actors include the Ministers of Trade, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and Coordinating Ministers of Economic Affairs.

However, due to the complexity of the negotiations between China and ASEAN regarding the COC, President Yudhoyono once expressed his impatience and said that "things do not necessarily have to be this slow," adding, "we need to send a strong signal to the world that the future of the SCS is predictable, manageable, and optimistic" (Weatherbee, 2016a). Parallel to that, in 2013, Indonesia decided to organise a multilateralism-oriented informal forum called "Workshops on Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea", which Indonesia had used since the 1990s. For Indonesia, this forum was designed to promote dialogue, encourage the conflicting parties concerned to seek solutions by creating a conducive atmosphere and develop concrete cooperation on technical matters (Laksmana, 2019).

It can be seen that during President Yudhoyono's administration, Indonesia made efforts to prioritise multilateralism as a response to the SCS Dispute. This can be seen from how Indonesia played an active role within ASEAN by trying to realise COC. Moreover, in 2012, when ASEAN faced internal divisions leading to the failure of a joint communique, Indonesia conducted shuttle diplomacy to

ease tensions. Even though it was minimal and consistently campaigned for the slogan "dynamic equilibrium", Indonesia also applied unilateralism approaches in responding the SCS, as shown by the manoeuvre of military bodies. Indonesia's multilateral efforts are proactive and diplomatic, while in the unilateral sphere, Indonesia is preventive and indirect. Hence, during the Yudhoyono administration, Laksmana (2019) described Indonesia in the SCS dispute as an "honest broker".

China's Assertiveness and Indonesia's Bureaucratic Politics under Jokowi

The Threat Grows, The Solidarity Narrows (2015-2017)

When President Jokowi came to power in 2014, China's level of assertiveness in the SCS was much higher than before, evident in the number of China's violations in Indonesia's waters, and several incidents involving China's vessels in the SCS (see Figure 1 & 2). Indonesia's foreign policy towards China, primarily related to the SCS conflict, is assessed differently by several researchers, such as Syailendra (2017) and Laksmana (2016). According to Syailendra (2017), Indonesia's response to Chinese assertiveness is "non-balancing", while Laksmana (2016) argues that Indonesia's response is "under-balancing". Even though they reach different conclusions, both researchers contend that bureaucratic politics is a factor influencing Indonesia's adoption of these two behaviors.

In the beginning of his tenure, Jokowi launched the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF), an ambitious maritime policy that once attracted international attentions. The GMF has five pillars: rebuilding maritime culture; maintaining and managing marine resources; infrastructure development and connectivity; maritime diplomacy; and building a maritime defence force (Sukma, 2017). To achieve one of GMF's pillars, Indonesia urgently requires foreign investment due to domestic budget constraints, particularly for infrastructure

development and connectivity. An estimated US\$ 450 billion is needed for the construction of highways, railways, ports, and power plants (Salim & Negara, 2016).

While Indonesia pursued substantial financial assistance for its domestic agenda, China has emerged as a key partner, actively promoting the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative. China stands out as a promising development partner, as it possesses the capacity to provide the massive investment that Indonesia requires. Because of this mechanism, Indonesia highly appreciates the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank while criticising Western financial institutions (Sambijantoro, 2015).

Regrettably, at a time when Indonesia increasingly needs China's significant role in Indonesia's infrastructure development efforts, China is also increasingly committing acts of violation of Indonesia's EEZ. China has violated Indonesia's sovereign rights in the Natuna Sea at least four times from 2014 to 2017 (CSIS, 2021). The Chinese Coast Guard consistently accompanied the Chinese fishermen's violation of Indonesia's sovereign rights, which often created tension between Indonesia and the Chinese authorities. Aside from violating Indonesia's EEZ, China's assertiveness has also increased in the SCS conflict. A study from CSIS (2021) shows that there have been various incidents involving China's authority and ships from other countries, such as the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Taiwan, that are absorbed into the vortex of the SCS conflict. These incidents include arrest, ramming, harassment, and shots fired, which occurred from 2010 to 2019. The following figure explains the trends of these incidents.

Hence, in responding to China's violations in Indonesia's EEZ, Indonesia employed fragmented policies resulting from conflicting interests among bureaucrats. Indonesian bureaucrats were divided on how to respond to China's actions: whether to take a firm stance or the opposite. For those opposing a strong approach, they argued that Indonesia currently needs substantial investment from China to realize GMF programs, and the SCS dispute

should be managed through accommodative and diplomatic avenues. Therefore, the attitude towards China needs to be cautious. On the contrary, for those supporting a strong approach, they argued that preserving territorial integrity and preventing potential economic losses due to China's illegal fishing activities were more substantial (see Syailendra, 2017).

These fractured policies can be seen, for example, when the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Susi Pudjiastuti held a press conference and said that Indonesia would send a protest note to China and summon the Chinese ambassador for questioning in 2016. Susi's attitude emerged after the Chinese ship *Kway Fey* violated the Indonesian EEZ in Natuna and was about to be caught by Indonesian authorities on March 19, 2016 (McRae, 2019). In contrast to Susi, the attitude of the Indonesian MoFA towards China's violations is more moderate. Armanatha Nasir, Spokesman for the MoFA, said that "not every problem should be resolved with overreaction" (Halim, 2016).

Bureaucratic frictions in response to China also occurred after the arrest of the Chinese fishing boat *Gui Bei Yu 27088* on May 27, 2016. A spokesman for Indonesian Navy stated that the arrest of these Chinese vessels "demonstrated to the world that Indonesia would take firm action against vessels that are trespassing on our territory" (D.W., 2016). In contrast, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, Coordinating Minister for Politics, Law and Security, who is also a prominent person in Indonesia-China relations, stated that "nothing happened. We will finish well" (Sindonews, 2016).

When China's assertiveness increased and bureaucratic politics influenced Indonesia's response, President Jokowi also joined in this process—and made a huge personal political gain—one of which involved adopting a "muscle-flexing" approach (Syailendra, 2017). For example, Jokowi held a limited meeting aboard the *KRI Imam Bondjol* in Natuna on June 23, 2016. The meeting was also attended by Minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, and several other ministers and high-level officials. The meeting ended with a photo of President Jokowi near

the KRI Imam Bondjol missile. It means that Indonesia gives a signal that Indonesia is serious about dealing with violations in the Natuna Sea (Muhibat, 2018). After this muscle-flexing response, a survey conducted by Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) revealed that 73.6 percent of the population believes that the Jokowi administration is strongly committed to enhancing Indonesia's maritime defense (Syailendra, 2017).

Natuna under *Latihan Pasukan Pemukul Reaksi Cepat* (PPRC), which involved 5900 personnel from the Indonesian Army, Navy and Air Force. President Jokowi emphasised that the PPRC exercise showed that the Indonesian military was very ready “to defend Indonesia” (Setkab, 2017).

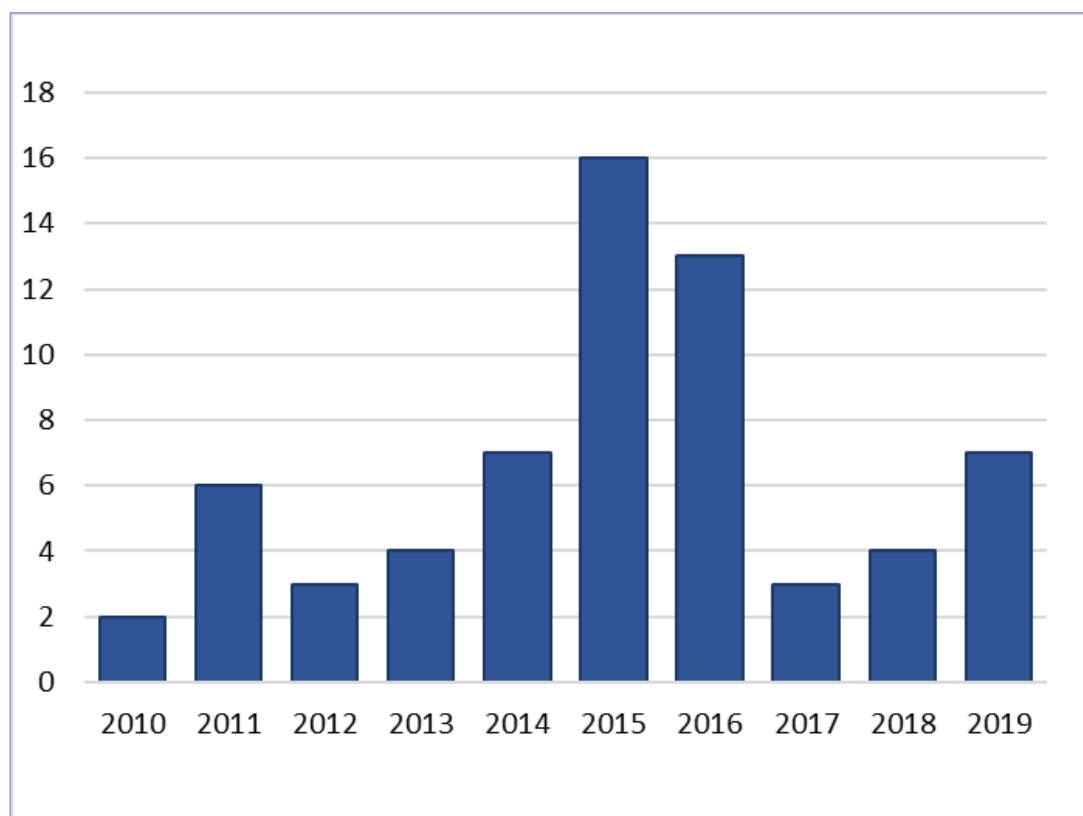


Figure 1. Incidents in The South China Sea Involving China

Source: (CSIS, 2021)

Jokowi's decision to personally visit Natuna in June 2016 is indicative of Indonesia pursuing a policy that prioritises unilateralism. Many unilateral policies emerged afterwards, such as constructing more massive military facilities and intensifying military exercises in Natuna. In October 2016, the Indonesian military held the *Angkasa Yudha* exercise, which involved as many as 73 Indonesian Air Force aircraft. By involving 2200 personnel, the exercise simulated air combat and bombing around the Natuna sea. In May 2017, Indonesia once again conducted a military exercise in

Indonesia's boldest unilateral decision was when the country decided to change the name of the Natuna Sea to the North Natuna Sea in July 2017. By obtaining endorsement from 21 Indonesian government agencies, Minister Susi confidently said, “that is the sea that belongs to us, the North Natuna Sea, not the South China Sea” (Detik, 2017). A leading Indonesian foreign policy observer, Hikmahanto Juwana, noted that the renaming strategy was “a move to step up Jakarta's stance against Beijing's claim on the Natuna Waters” (Suryadinata,

2017). Unfortunately, this policy later became controversial because there was a conflicting response among Indonesian policymakers. After receiving a protest from China in August 2017, Minister Luhut stated that the name change policy “was not endorsed by me” (Indonesia Update, 2017).

From the explanation above, unilateral policies—with their erratic style—seem prevalent in Indonesia’s responses towards the SCS dispute. These were the results of strong bureaucratic frictions within Indonesia’s government: some bureaucrats chose to take a firm stance against China’s actions, while others did not. Simultaneously, as Indonesia’s unilateral tendencies increased, observers noted a diminishing role for Indonesia as a mediator in the conflict, and chose to face the SCS dispute “by going it alone” (Connelly, 2016). Multilateralism, Indonesia’s long strategy to face the SCS dispute and the most reliable approach that has been used by this country for decades, thus, decreased.

The best example of Indonesia’s decline in the multilateral effort was when the Philippines submitted its dispute with China to the International Tribunal Law of the Sea (ITLOS). Following the submission, China sought support from ASEAN member countries in dealing with the Philippines’ decision. In the AMM in 2016, before ITLOS declared that the nine-dash line claim was not legal, ASEAN countries initially attempted to provide a joint statement regarding the ITLOS. However, this attempt failed because of Cambodia’s position of neutrality and prevented the Singaporean foreign minister from giving a press statement. This failure wanted to be corrected by Indonesia but was later undone. When Minister Retno Marsudi intended to conduct shuttle diplomacy, similar to what Marty Natalegawa had done in 2012, President Jokowi believed that issuing a joint statement would likely provoke anger from China (Connelly, 2016). Consequently, the ITLOS decision that won the Philippines was ignored by ASEAN, and Indonesia responded to it lukewarmly (Laksmiana, 2016).

The Dusk of Disunity (2018-Present)

At the end of President Jokowi’s first tenure, Indonesia began to reactivate its multilateral efforts at the regional level. However, this effort does not necessarily only focus on the issue of the SCS. Under President Jokowi, Indonesia realised that the SCS dispute became increasingly complex and part of a greater geopolitical tension. Jakarta witnessed the great powers began to expand their interests in this region. The United States, which is asserting its Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) and the emergence of Indo-Pacific discourse, also makes the conflict more complicated. This action is followed by the reactivation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, often called The Quad, consisting of Japan, India, Australia and the United States, to contain China’s expansionist foreign policy (Thi Ha, 2021). At the same time, Indonesia also witnesses China’s growing influence in Southeast Asia under the Belt and Road Initiative project. The intensity of the intervention of the great powers is undoubtedly very different during the time of President Yudhoyono—the SCS dispute has evolved into a more internationalised issue that requires a deliberate approach.

For this reason, Indonesia then tried to maintain and strengthen ASEAN solidarity and establish the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). Indonesia argues that ASEAN must gain momentum from the rapidly growing Indo-Pacific discourse in the geopolitical arena. Indonesia’s first attempt to invite ASEAN to adopt the AOIP was carried out at the 32nd ASEAN meeting in Singapore on April 28 2018. At that time, the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs and President Jokowi lobbied ASEAN countries to support the draft prepared by Indonesia. On the same occasion, President Jokowi emphasised the importance of ASEAN in leading and initiating the Indo-Pacific cooperation so that it becomes a region that prioritises inclusive dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution and avoids violence (Anwar, 2020).

Indeed, Indonesia's effort to establish the AOIP received negative views from its ASEAN counterparts. In 2018, Bilahari Kausikan, a senior foreign policy analyst from Singapore, stated that "at present ASEAN is at best agnostic", while the "free and open Indo-Pacific concept" was still lacking clarity, and thus "too narrow as a basis to attract wider support" (Kausikan, 2018). Due to the pessimistic view of the ASEAN leaders, Indonesia then tried to formulate the concept of Indo-Pacific cooperation under all the criteria set by ASEAN members. After extensive discussions internally and externally, the Indonesian MoFA finally produced a draft entitled "Indonesia's perspective for an ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific: towards a peaceful, prosperous, and inclusive region".

To make Indo-Pacific cooperation realised and place ASEAN as an institution with a significant role is very solid, Indonesia also launched a national initiative. On March 20 2019, Indonesia held a high-level dialogue on Indo-Pacific cooperation in Jakarta. This forum was attended by foreign ministers, vice-ministers and senior officials of the 18 members of the East Asia Summit (EAS). This policy activism ultimately has a real impact. At the 34th ASEAN meeting in Bangkok on June 23, 2019, the leaders of ASEAN member countries agreed to adopt Indonesia's idea of the AOIP (Anwar, 2020).

China's challenge with Indonesia's waters is also increasingly common. From 2018 to 2021, at least it was recorded that China had intruded into Indonesian EEZ waters as many as ten times (see Figure 2). In responding to the illegal entrance of Chinese ships in December 2019, Jokowi visited Natuna on January 8, 2020, and emphasised that "there is no bargaining over Indonesian sovereignty". Unfortunately, three days after Jokowi's visit, Indonesia's naval ships encountered six Chinese Coast Guard ships, one Chinese fisheries surveillance ship, and 49 foreign trawling vessels in the North Natuna Sea (Bisnis, 2020).

Since 2018 until now, there has been no sign of bureaucratic frictions like during the early period of President Jokowi's administration.

Jokowi's has made consolidation of power through cabinet reshuffle. Some analysts argue that this action cannot be separated from the political decision to replace high-ranking officials in Indonesia who have been too vocal—and thus resulting in inconsistencies in the government's stance—about several of China's projects in the country, including the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway. (Rakhmat, 2022). Arif Havas Oegroseno, the former Deputy Minister of Maritime Sovereignty and one of the advocates for renaming the North Natuna Sea, had his position changed to become Indonesia's Ambassador to Germany in 2018. Additionally, Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Susi Pudjiastuti, known for her firm attitude against China's illegal fishing activities, did not continue her position in the second term of President Jokowi's administration (Ulya & Djumena, 2020).

Because bureaucratic frictions have been suppressed, multilateralism became an important pillar of Indonesia's foreign policy to deal with China's growing assertiveness. Even so, Indonesia also continues to use unilateral policies. On behalf of internal balancing, Indonesia has established Joint Military Command (Kogabwilhan) in Natuna and built a coast guard training centre with funds of 3.5 million U.S. dollars in Batam (Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, 2021). Indonesia and the United States were also involved in Garuda Shield XV Exercise in August 2021, the largest joint exercise between the two countries. This joint exercise was attended by 2,161 Indonesian Army and 1,547 United States Army and took place in several provinces in Indonesia (Darlis, 2021). Indonesia's newest unilateral strategy in responding to China's intrusion in Natuna is to expand offshore energy exploration in the controversial waters contested by China, by installing the Noble Clyde Boudreaux semi-submersible rig in the North Natuna Sea (Allard, Lamb, & Da Costa, 2021).

Caught between China's Assertiveness and Domestic Bureaucratic Politics? Assessing Indonesia's Response

This section will explain the general relation between China's assertiveness and Indonesia's bureaucratic friction to Indonesia's foreign policy towards the SCS imbroglio. This section utilises Indonesia's foreign policy trajectory by two administrations: President Yudhoyono and President Jokowi. To do that, Schweller's work on neoclassical realism would be suitable to analyse the relationship between those variables and the impact on Indonesia's behaviour.

It is explained above that during Yudhoyono's presidency, China's assertiveness began to rise slowly, which has significant implications for Indonesia's behaviour (Johnston, 2013; Laksmana, 2019; Yahuda, 2013). In the second term of his leadership, China's assertive actions spread in the SCS conflict and started pulling Indonesia into this vortex of interests. Along with this rise in assertiveness, Indonesia under President Yudhoyono also experienced divisions among bureaucrats in viewing and responding to China's assertiveness (Farneubun, 2018; Syailendra, 2017). Bureaucratic friction arose around the 2013-2014 period, the final years of Yudhoyono's leadership during his second term. The observers have argued that Indonesia under Yudhoyono behaved as an "honest broker" in the SCS conflict.

During President Jokowi's administration, China's assertiveness has rapidly increased, even to a threatening stage. To illustrate how China's assertiveness was greater during President Jokowi's time compared to Yudhoyono, the following is a figure depicting China's vessel entering Indonesia's EEZ from 2009 to 2021. Collected from various sources, the graph below shows how China's assertiveness has been consistently inclined and reached its peak in 2020.

Even though this assertiveness has increased rapidly compared to before, Indonesia under Jokowi from 2014 to 2017 had bureaucratic friction that was even more intense when compared to the time

of President Yudhoyono (Connelly, 2016; Laksmana, 2016; Syailendra, 2017). The result of China's increased assertiveness and Indonesia's bureaucratic politics is the frequent appearance of unilateral policies rather than multilateral efforts at the beginning of Jokowi's administration. After several years of Jokowi's leadership, China's assertiveness continued to increase, but bureaucratic politics in the internal government was reduced. This condition increases Indonesia's multilateralism efforts, although it still uses unilateral methods. Hence, Sari (2021) described that Indonesia under President Jokowi in his second tenure has adopted a "prudent strategy" in responding to China's assertiveness.

By looking at how Indonesia's behaviour was under President Yudhoyono and Jokowi, this article found that Indonesia's multilateralism nexus depends on the degrees of bureaucratic politics and China's assertiveness. The following figure explains how Indonesia's multilateralism program in the defence sector experienced its ups and downs during the reigns of President Yudhoyono and Jokowi.

From the graph above, it is observed that multilateralism almost always experienced a positive trend from 2009 to 2014, when President Yudhoyono underwent his second tenure, and China's assertiveness began to increase (see Figure 1 & 2). During that period, Indonesia focused on implementing the DOC and realising the COC in the SCS dispute (Aplianta, 2015; Laksmana, 2019).

In 2015, multilateralism increased as the sea incidents involving China in the SCS skyrocketed (see Figure 1). However, the trends then dropped sharply in 2016 and 2017. During this time, China's assertiveness increased sharply, and bureaucratic conflicts among Indonesian policymakers also became dominant in Jokowi's leadership. The result is the decrease of multilateralism, and unilateral policies are increased, as demonstrated, for example, by the development of military facilities, the intensification of military exercise, and the renaming of the North Natuna Sea. During this period, Indonesia abandoned the "honest broker" role and instead chose to face China's challenge by "going it alone" (Connelly, 2016)

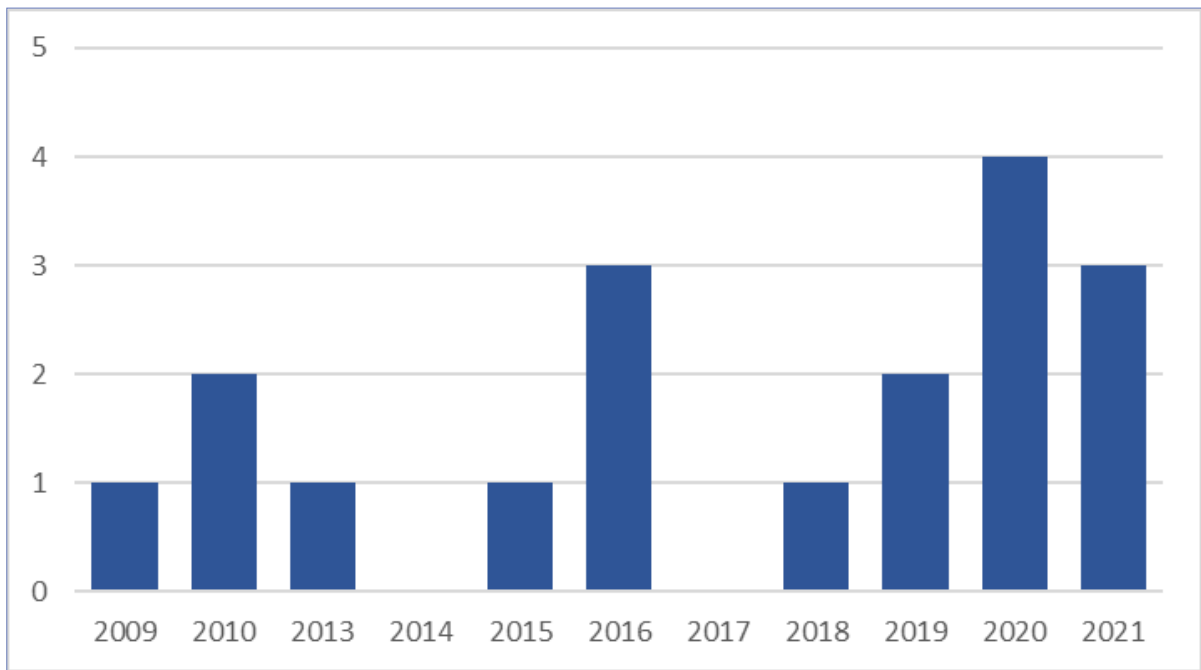


Figure 2. Total of Chinese violations in the North Natuna Sea (2009-2021)
Source: (CNN Indonesia, 2021; CSIS, 2021; Kompas, 2021; Laksmana, 2019)

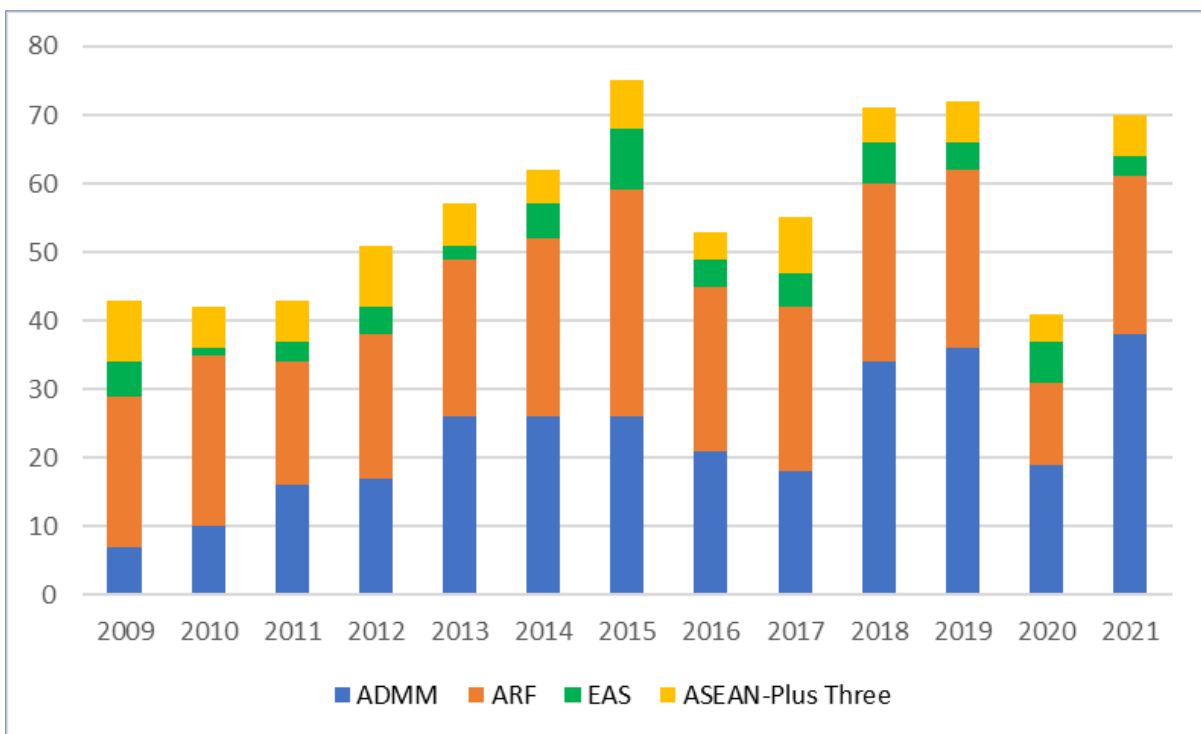


Figure 3. Indonesia's Involvement in Multilateral Diplomacy in the Defence Sector (2009-2021)
Source: (ASEAN, 2022b, 2022d, 2022a, 2022c)

		Domestic Bureaucratic Politics	
		High	Low
External Pressure (China's Assertiveness)	High	<p>Unilateralism increased and multilateralism decreased</p> <p>Building military facilities, intensifying military exercises, and renaming the North Natuna Sea.</p> <p>The early period of President Jokowi's first administration (2014-2017)</p>	<p>Multilateralism increased and unilateralism was slightly maintained</p> <p>Indonesia is active in various multilateral forums, including pioneering AOIP</p> <p>The late period of President Jokowi's first administration until recent times (2018-present)</p>
	Low	<p>Unilateralism slightly increased and multilateralism was maintained</p> <p>Indonesian military bodies showed their stance. However, Indonesia still prioritised to pursue multilateral instruments (realisation of COC).</p> <p>The end of President Yudhoyono's second administration (2013-2014)</p>	<p>Multilateralism increased and unilateralism decreased</p> <p>Indonesia was active as a fervent mediator in the SCS conflict. The DOC and COC became President Yudhoyono's top priority.</p> <p>The early period of President Yudhoyono's second administration (2009-2012)</p>

Table 1. Indonesia's Response to the SCS Dispute Based on External Pressure (China's Assertiveness) - Domestic Bureaucratic Politics Model

From 2018 until now, China's assertiveness is still high, but bureaucratic frictions in the Indonesian government have been successfully suppressed by President Jokowi. This resulted in a notable policy programme: Indonesia was active in multilateral forums and even produced the AOIP.

This article presents how China's assertiveness and Indonesia's bureaucratic politics affect Indonesia's behaviour towards the SCS conflict. These variables have increased and decreased the intensity of multilateral and unilateral policies carried out by Indonesia in responding the SCS dispute. By linking to the theory of Neoclassical Realism, this

research confirms that China's assertiveness disrupts distribution of power, which is the hallmark of Neorealism. By effect, it impacts how states behave. However, that variable is not deterministic, bearing in mind that there is still domestic politics interpreting systemic pressure. The positive trends of Indonesia's involvement in the defense-related multilateral forums from 2009 to 2021 reflect how external pressure drives the state to balance the threat, despite also experiencing fluctuation due to bureaucratic frictions in Indonesia's domestic politics. The following table explains the trajectory of Indonesia's behavior during the SCS conflict under two different presidents

considering China's assertiveness and domestic bureaucratic politics

While the table traces and documents Indonesia's response to the SCS dispute, it can also serve as a model elucidating four scenarios regarding how a state possibly utilises multilateral and unilateral strategies when facing external pressure and domestic bureaucratic politics:

- S-1 : States will increase multilateralism and decrease unilateralism when external pressure is low and domestic bureaucratic politics is low.
- S-2 : States will increase unilateralism and decrease multilateralism when external pressure is high and domestic bureaucratic politics is high.
- S-3 : States will slightly increase unilateralism and still maintain multilateralism when external pressure is low and domestic bureaucratic politics is high.
- S-4 : States will increase multilateralism and slightly maintain the use of unilateralism when external pressure is high and domestic bureaucratic politics is low.

Conclusion

China's increasing assertiveness in the recent SCS disputes and friction between policymakers within the Indonesian government has attracted researchers' interest in analysing how Indonesia's foreign policy can result from these two conditions. The researchers focused on explaining whether Indonesia could respond properly by increasing China's threat, given the internal divisions. Unlike that discussion, this article attempts to explain the dynamics of China's assertiveness and Indonesia's bureaucratic politics as a representation of external pressure and domestic political variables in the theory of Neoclassical Realism to see the trajectory of Indonesia's foreign policy towards the SCS dispute. In order to comprehensively analyse Indonesia's response trajectory, this

article compares Indonesia's response under President Yudhoyono and Jokowi.

This study found that China's assertiveness and bureaucratic politics affected Indonesia's foreign policy towards the SCS conflict during both President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's and President Joko Widodo's terms. Along with China's increasing assertiveness from year to year, Indonesia's foreign policy patterns have changed under President Yudhoyono and President Jokowi. During President Yudhoyono's presidency, when China's assertiveness began to increase in the South China Sea, Indonesia made adjustments to this condition with its foreign policy instruments. This adjustment increased Indonesia's active role in multilateral forums and unilateral policies. In the early days of Yudhoyono's administration, in his second term, Indonesia prioritised the implementation of the DOC, the formation of the COC, and trying to become a mediator in the SCS dispute. During the last period of his leadership, bureaucratic politics swept through Yudhoyono's administration through the anger of Indonesian military bodies. Nonetheless, Indonesia, under his leadership, continues to prioritise multilateral means.

During President Jokowi, China's assertiveness in the SCS increased sharply. Violations by China's vessels escorted by coast guards in the North Natuna Sea were becoming more frequent. At the same time, as China's threat grew, divisions within the Indonesian government also spread. Therefore, at the beginning of his administration, President Jokowi responded to the SCS dispute using unilateral means, such as the development of military facilities, the intensification of military exercises in Natuna, and the naming of the North Natuna Sea. In line with the use of unilateral instruments and the weakening of multilateralism, Indonesia's role as a mediator in the SCS conflict began to diminish.

From the end of President Jokowi's first tenure until the present times, China's assertiveness has continued to rise. However, along with the consolidation of power in his government, bureaucratic politics died down. At this stage, Indonesia began responding to

the SCS conflict with notable steps: activating multilateralism by formulating the AOIP and unilateral ways to go hand in hand with it. With these research findings, this article affirms the effectiveness of Neoclassical Realism theory in explaining foreign policy formation and its dynamics over time, particularly in the context of Indonesia in the SCS dispute.

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