
“Jackal Middle Power”: Rethinking Indonesian Middlepowermanship

Dion Maulana Prasetya *, Suyatno Ladiqi **,
and Mohd. Afandi Bin Salleh ***

Abstract

This present study examines Indonesian foreign policy behavior, especially its role as a middle power. It is essential to (re)consider revisionist tendencies in Indonesia’s middlepowermanship since it has not always supported the established world order. However, most international relations scholars have failed to accurately depict the nature of Indonesian middlepowermanship, often arguing that Indonesia only supports the liberal world order. This article attempts to escape from the prevailing analysis by bringing revisionist-like foreign policy behaviors back into Indonesia’s middlepowermanship analysis. To achieve this, it adopts Randall Schweller’s concept of “Jackal

*Dion Maulana Prasetya is from Department of International Relations, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang Indonesia and Faculty of Law and International Relations, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia. E-mail: dionprasetya@umm.ac.id. Dion Maulana Prasetya is the corresponding author of this article.

**Suyatno Ladiqi is from Faculty of Law and International Relations, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia. E-mail: yatno.ladiqi@gmail.com.

*** Mohd. Afandi Bin Salleh is from Faculty of Law and International Relations, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia. E-mail: afandisaleh@gmail.com.

bandwagoning,” which can be observed through specific behavior patterns such as dissatisfaction with the status quo and an inclination to bandwagon with rising powers.

Keywords: Indonesia; middle power; revisionist; status-quo;
Jackal middle power

I. Introduction

Indonesia has recently attracted scholars' attention. Geographically, Indonesia is the world's largest archipelagic state, as well as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation. It is also considered the world's third-largest democracy after India and the United States.¹ Economically, Indonesia is rapidly developing. In 2016, Indonesia's GDP ranked 8th and was projected to be the fourth largest by 2050, according to PwC.² Meanwhile, Indonesia's military expenditure enjoyed a significant increase, rising by 105% between 2006 and 2015,³ in an attempt to achieve a “Minimum Essential Force” by 2024.

The roles and behavior of Indonesia have also been subject to scholarly research. In the era between the late 1960s and 1970s, Indonesia was often seen as a ‘natural leader’ or *primus inter pares* (first among equals) in the region, even though it was not fully supported by neither actual military nor economic capability. Additionally, it can be considered that Indonesia played the role of middle power – as a mediator. This role is clearly evident in Indonesia's initiatives towards the

¹ “Indonesia - the World Factbook.” CIA, May 5, 2022.

<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/indonesia/>.

² “The World in 2050.” PricewaterhouseCoopers, February, 2017.

<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/research-insights/economy/the-world-in-2050.html>.

³ “SIPRI Military Expenditure Database | SIPRI 2018.” SIRPI, accessed June 7, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

Malaysia-Philippines dispute over Sabah in 1968 and the Cambodia-Vietnam conflict between 1979 and 1991.⁴

In the post-reformation period, Acharya believes that Indonesia's rise as an emerging power rests on democracy and regional engagement rather than solely on economic growth and military spending.⁵ This argument is based on a comparison between Indonesia and other emerging powers that are either significant militarily or economically. What makes Indonesia interesting is its active role as a mediator and facilitator despite not being a dominant actor in terms of military and economic capability. Acharya asserts that Indonesia has performed these roles more actively than other regional major powers, such as China, India, and Japan. Despite its incomplete and sectoral forms of leadership,⁶ Indonesia's active mediation in regional conflicts has contributed to its status as a regional leader. Similar views are also expressed by G. Thies and C. Sari⁷ and Karim,⁸ who define

⁴ Christopher B. Roberts and Erlina Widyaningsih. "Indonesian Leadership in ASEAN: Mediation, Agency and Extra-Regional Diplomacy," in *Indonesia's Ascent: Power, Leadership, and the Regional Order*, Christopher Roberts, Ahmad Habir, and Leonard C. Sebastian, eds. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (2015): 264-286. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137397416_13.

⁵ Amitav Acharya. *Indonesia Matters: Asia's Emerging Democratic Power*. Singapore: World Scientific, (2014).

⁶ Ralf Emmers. "Indonesia's Role in ASEAN: A Case of Incomplete and Sectorial Leadership," *The Pacific Review* 27, no. 4 (2014): 543-62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2014.924230>.

⁷ Cameron G. Thies and Angguntari C. Sari. "A Role Theory Approach to Middle Powers: Making Sense of Indonesia's Place in the International System," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 40, no. 3 (2018): 397-421. <https://doi.org/10.1355/cs40-3c>.

Indonesian foreign policy by examining the roles it plays, which include being a supporter of multilateralism, a good international citizen, a supporter of the international order, a voice for developing countries, a regional leader, an advocate of democracy, and a bridge-builder.

This present study aims to examine Indonesian foreign policy behavior, especially its role as a middle power. It is essential to (re)consider revisionist tendencies in Indonesia’s middlepowermanship since it has not always been a supporter of the established world order. However, most international relations scholars have failed to accurately depict the nature of Indonesian middlepowermanship, often arguing that Indonesia only supports the liberal world order. The problem is, empirically, middle powers perform not only as supporters of the established order but also as autonomous actors in relation to major powers.⁹ In other words, middle powers should not be overgeneralized as mere supporters of the status quo.

The problem occurred when scholars attempted to understand middle powers from wealthy and democratic countries

⁸ Moch Faisal Karim. “Role Legitimation in Foreign Policy: The Case of Indonesia as an Emerging Power under Yudhoyono’s Presidency (2004–2014),” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 17, no. 3 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orab010>.

⁹ Robert W. Cox. “Middlepowermanship, Japan, and Future World Order,” *International Journal* 44, No. 4 (1989): 823. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070208904400405>.

such as Canada and Australia.¹⁰ This inevitably led to an overgeneralization of the concept of middle power, which encompassed only those Western democratic and affluent countries that deliberately supported the established American world order. Today, as the number of middle power countries continues to increase, the concept of middle power has expanded to include “emerging middle powers,” denoting unstable or newly democratized and developing states such as Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, Malaysia, South Africa, and Turkey.¹¹ However, Jordaan is convinced that “middle powers do not challenge or threaten the global status quo” despite any discord that may arise with major powers. Additionally, Jordaan eliminates the revisionist countries, or, using his term, “states that deviate from hegemonic orthodoxy.” His more recent article suggests “to say goodbye” to the concept of “emerging” or “Southern” middle powers from the dictionary while simultaneously advocating that we “stop classifying middling states with counter-hegemonic tendencies as middle powers.”¹²

¹⁰ Andrew Cooper, Richard A. Higgott, and Kim Richard Nossal. *Relocating middle powers: Australia and Canada in a changing world order*, Vancouver: UBC, (1993).

¹¹ Eduard Jordaan. “The concept of a middle power in international relations: distinguishing between emerging and traditional middle powers,” *Politikon* 30, No. 1 (2003): 165-181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0258934032000147282>.

¹² Eduard Jordaan. “The emerging middle power concept: Time to say goodbye?” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 24, No. 3 (2017): 395-412. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2017.1394218>.

The existing literature on Indonesian middlepowermanship, unfortunately, is also dominated by the status quo analysis while neglecting the country’s resistance to the established world order. The majority of the studies suggest that Indonesia follows common patterns of foreign policy behavior, closely related to specific roles such as order-maker,¹³ supporter of multilateralism,¹⁴ democracy promoter,¹⁵ and bridge-builder.¹⁶ This article attempts to escape from the prevailing analysis by bringing revisionist-like foreign policy behaviors back into Indonesia’s middlepowermanship analysis. To achieve this, it adopts Randall Schweller’s concept of “Jackal bandwagoning,” which can be observed through specific behavior patterns such as dissatisfaction with the status quo and an inclination to bandwagon with rising powers.¹⁷

To substantiate the argument, we organize the article into seven sections. Following the introduction, we provide a brief overview of the theoretical debates on middle power and the issue of status quo bias. Subsequently, we review current studies on

¹³ I Gede Wahyu Wicaksana. “The family state: a non-realist approach to understanding Indonesia’s foreign policy,” *Asian Journal of Political Science* 27, No. 3 (2019): 308-328. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2019.1686997>.

¹⁴ Thies and Sari. “A Role Theory Approach to Middle Powers,” 397-421.

¹⁵ Moch Faisal Karim. “Role conflict and the limits of state identity: the case of Indonesia in democracy promotion,” *The Pacific Review* 30, No. 3 (2017): 385–404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2016.1249908>.

¹⁶ Acharya, *Indonesia Matters*.

¹⁷ Randall L. Schweller. “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” *International Security* 19, No. 1 (1994): 72-107. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539149>.

Indonesian middlepowermanship, which are also overshadowed by status quo analysis. The next section involves an examination of revisionist middle powers. The following section discusses the examination of Indonesia's middle power revisionist tendencies. The final section concludes the study.

II. Literature Review

In the practical realm, the concept of middle power has been widely defined as “states that are neither great nor small in terms of international power, capacity, and influence and demonstrate a propensity to promote cohesion and stability in the world system.”¹⁸ In terms of behavior, middle powers often opt for multilateralism and practice “niche diplomacy” to achieve specific foreign policy objectives in alignment with their limited power capabilities.¹⁹

Eduard Jordaan has made a significant contribution by categorizing middle powers into two groups: traditional and emerging middle powers.²⁰ According to Jordaan, traditional middle powers are wealthy, egalitarian, and well-established democracies, primarily consisting of Western states like Norway, Canada, The Netherlands, Sweden, and Australia. In contrast,

¹⁸ Jordaan, “The Concept of a Middle Power in International Relations,” 165–81.

¹⁹ Şuhnaz Yilmaz. “Middle Powers and Regional Powers,” *Oxford Bibliographies Online Datasets*, (2017).
<https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199743292-0222>.

²⁰ Jordaan, “The Concept of a Middle Power,” 165-181.

emerging middle powers differ significantly. They face income inequality issues, possess unstable democracies, and often come from non-Western backgrounds. Some examples of emerging middle powers include Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, Malaysia, South Africa and Turkey. Their behavior is distinct as well. Emerging middle powers are seen as “reformists” within the international system, while the traditional middle powers tend to be “status-quo” seekers. To simplify the classification of the concept, the inclusion of specific multilateral groups, such as MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia), can serve as a convenient reference point for middle powers.²¹

While classifying middle power in the practical realm may appear simpler and less debatable, the same cannot be said for the academic field. Scholars have engaged in disputes over the concept from various perspectives. Conventional approaches often rely on materialistic views when classifying middle powers. They attempt to approach the concept similarly to what Morgenthau,²² Organski,²³ Kenneth Waltz,²⁴ and others did with great powers – placing primary emphasis on tangible elements of

²¹ Andrew F. Cooper and Emel Parlar Dal. “Positioning the Third Wave of Middle Power Diplomacy: Institutional Elevation, Practice Limitations,” *International Journal: Canada’s Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 71, no. 4 (December 2016): 516–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702016686385>.

²² Hans J. Morgenthau. *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: A.A. Knopf, (1948).

²³ A. F. K. Organski. *World Politics*. New York: Knopf, (1969).

²⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz. *Theory of International Politics*. Boston: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, (1979).

power while still considering the role of national morale. This school of thought is typically referred to as the “positional” or sometimes “hierarchical” approach.

The position approach focuses on material factors like gross domestic product (GDP), population, military size, and defense spending to create a quantifiable ranking of state size.²⁵ To provide a similar perspective, Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal²⁶ suggested that middle powers are those that occupy “the ‘middle’ point in a range of bigness to smallness - usually measured by reference to such quantifiable attributes as area, population, size, complexity and strength of economy, military capability, and other comparable factors.” Another “physical” consideration in this concept examines the importance of a state’s geography. This category includes “a state physically located ‘in the middle’ between the system’s great powers.” There are two types within this variant: the first consists of states that are influential within their geographic region – or often referred to as regional powers,²⁷ and the second type includes states that occupy a “middle” position, ideologically, standing between polarized great powers – Indonesia might be the best example within this category.

²⁵ Andrew Carr. “Is Australia a Middle Power? A Systemic Impact Approach,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 68, no. 1 (2013): 70–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2013.840264>.

²⁶ Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal, *Relocating Middle Powers*.

²⁷ Yilmaz, “Middle Powers and Regional Powers”.

The hierarchical approach was most prominent during the Cold War and was used to categorize wealthy Western states, as classified by Jordaan as “traditional middle power,” such as Canada, Australia, Sweden, and the Netherlands. These states were considered the “fittest” category of middle powers in terms of economic and military size. Despite their smaller populations, they did not fall into the category of small states. As Thomson confidently stated, “No matter how you look at it, from a military perspective, we’re a middle power behaving like a middle power. Our military capacity broadly accords with our population and economic weight, and we use that capacity on an unexceptional scale, which is proportionately somewhat smaller than our key Anglo allies.”²⁸

Defining middle power in an “objective” manner does not always lead to simplicity, and criticisms have arisen to challenge this approach. Some argue that the positional approach has failed to predict or explain the behavior of states classified as middle powers.²⁹ In response to this criticism, the liberal or “behavioral” approach has emerged, aiming to offer an alternative definition that focuses on how middle powers act. This is by no means providing prescriptive analytics of what middle powers “should

²⁸ Mark Thompson. “Punching above Our Weight? Australia as a Middle Power,” *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, (2005): 1–13.

²⁹ John Ravenhill. “Cycles of middle power activism: Constraint and choice in Australian and Canadian,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 52, No. 3 (1998): 309-327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357719808445259>.

be” doing, yet rather offering “what type of diplomatic behavior they do, or could, display in common.”³⁰ The next question then becomes: what kinds of behaviors do middle powers typically perform? Wood provided a clear answer, stating that they have “their tendency to pursue multilateral solutions to international problems, their tendency to embrace compromise positions in international disputes, and their tendency to embrace notions of ‘good international citizenship’ to guide their diplomacy.”³¹

Middle powers engage in certain behaviors because they have limited capabilities to play active roles in global affairs, unlike great powers. Cooper introduces the concept of “niche diplomacy” to describe how middle powers’ foreign policy targets specific areas that have not been adequately addressed by major powers.³² This type of middle power diplomacy is well-described by Janice Gross Stein, who once wrote about Canadian foreign policy: “Canada cannot be everywhere and do everything. If it attempts to do so, it risks dissipating its resources and sliding into policies of mediocrity. Canada must define its priorities, identify areas of comparative advantage, develop ‘niche’ policies, and

³⁰ Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal, *Relocating Middle Powers*, 19.

³¹ Bernard Wood. *The Middle Powers and the General Interest*. Ottawa: North South Inst, (1988): 20.

³² Andrew F Cooper. *Niche Diplomacy*. London: Macmillan, (1997).

focus its resources so that Canada contributes distinctively across the broad spectrum of common security.”³³

The limited capabilities that middle power possesses shape a distinct pattern of middle power behavior. Middle powers tend to act collectively through multilateral institutions to create a systemic impact on specific issues. As noted by Robert O. Keohane in his article, “A middle power is a state whose leaders consider that it cannot act alone effectively but may be able to have a systemic impact in a small group or through an international institution.”³⁴ Another salient feature of middle powers is their role as a “bridge-builder” between great powers. They fill a void by attempting to reduce tensions between great powers, especially when it comes to defusing internal conflict caused by rivalry among great powers in a particular state.

In the post-Cold War era, middle powers have expanded their roles within international politics, engaging in a more diverse and multifaceted type of diplomatic behavior. Their leadership and initiative-taking are not solely based on structural power but are “associated with the energetic and creative use of their diplomatic talents.”³⁵ In line with this, Australian Prime Minister Kevin

³³ Janice Gross Stein. “Canada 21: A Moment and a Model,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 2, no. 1 (1994): 9–13.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.1994.9673019>.

³⁴ Robert O. Keohane. “Lilliputians’ Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics,” *International Organization* 23, no. 2 (1969): 291–310.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/s002081830003160x>.

³⁵ Cooper and Dal, “Positioning the Third Wave,” 516-528.

Rudd introduced a new foreign policy concept known as “creative middle power diplomacy,” which hinges “on the will to reenergize and redefine Australia’s foreign policy into proactive global engagement.”³⁶ To be more practical, Rudd’s doctrine aims to establish “new global and regional institutions, the reinvigoration of nuclear disarmament, and the successful negotiation of a new instrument to address climate change.” By adopting such a style of foreign policy, as suggested by Baba & Kaya, Australia can play an active role in the international arena as a “regional power prosecuting global interests.”

Finally, there is the constructivist or identity approach, which differs significantly from the two “objective” approaches mentioned earlier because it takes a constructivist perspective. In contrast to their rationalist counterparts, constructivists argue that normative or ideational structures are as significant as material structures, whether they are manifested through military or economic capabilities. As Alexander Wendt notes, “material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded.”³⁷ Furthermore, non-material structures not only influence states’ identity but, in turn, also their actions. This is something that

³⁶ G. Baba and T. O. Kaya. “Testing the Creativity of Kevin Rudd’s Middle Power Diplomacy: EU-Australia Partnership Framework versus the Asia-Pacific Community,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 14, no. 2 (2014): 239–69. <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lct025>.

³⁷ Alexander Wendt. *Constructing International Politics*. Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, (1995), 75.

rationalists see as nothing important to find the source of preferences but take it for granted and only focus on the “strategic domain” of the state’s foreign policy.³⁸

Based on the basic notions of constructivism above, this approach looks at how a state has constructed its image as a middle power, how this self-perception has been projected in its foreign policy behavior, and if other actors view the state as a middle power.³⁹ As Hurrell argues, middle power should not be defined by “some set of objective attributes or by objective geopolitical or geoeconomic circumstances, but rather as a self-created identity or ideology.”⁴⁰ By way of this view, he adds, middlepowermanship “becomes an embedded guiding narrative, a particular foreign policy ideology that can be traced historically, that is rooted within and around particular parts of the bureaucracy, and that can be perhaps related to broader trends or tendencies in the domestic politics of the country.”

To sum up, each approach offers unique insights into explaining middle powers in international politics. However, it is

³⁸ Christian Reus-Smith. “Constructivism,” in *Theories of International Relations*, ed. Scott Burchill. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, (2009).

³⁹ Sarah Teo. “Middle Power Identities of Australia and South Korea: Comparing the Kevin Rudd/Julia Gillard and Lee Myung-Bak Administrations,” *The Pacific Review* 31, no. 2 (2017): 221–39.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2017.1371210>.

⁴⁰ Andrew Hurrell. “Some Reflections on the Role of Intermediate Powers in International Institutions,” in *Paths to Power: Foreign Policy Strategies of Intermediate States*. Washington, D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, (2000): 1–11.

notable that many studies suffer from status-quo bias. This bias refers to a research preference towards a country's foreign policy behavior, which primarily focuses on its status-quo mode, such as its inclination towards multilateralism and liberal democracy. By focusing mainly on a country's status quo behavior, scholars aim to identify common patterns of middlepowermanship. Nonetheless, as states joining the group of middle power continue to proliferate recently, the attempt has led to a "dead-end," as suggested by Hurrell:

*"There are, then, few, if any, common patterns of behavior as to how a particular group of middle or intermediate powers will behave internationally because of the variation in the types of states involved, the categories of power that they possess, and the arenas within which they operate are all so various."*⁴¹

To address this puzzle, instead of looking for general patterns in diverse middle power behavior, a group of scholars have shifted their focus to common behavioral patterns of middle powers, which, by coincidence, all tend to be supporters of the status quo.⁴² It is problematic that most scholars only consider "status-quo middle powers" to construct a coherent conceptual

⁴¹ Hurrell, *Some Reflections on the Role of Intermediate Powers*.

⁴² Jordaan, "The concept of a middle power," 165-181; Jordaan, "The emerging middle power concept," 395-412.

framework while simultaneously citing earlier works on middle powers – which, naturally, did not distinguish between those closely related to the status quo or revisionism. For instance, the work of Bartolus of Sassoferrato in grading ancient Italian states, which put Venice and Florence as examples of ‘middle powers’ in 14th-century Europe,⁴³ is frequently cited by modern scholars when attempting to conceptualize contemporary middle powers. However, what they often overlook is the fact that Venice and Florence behaved quite differently – with Florence and its allies inclined towards the status quo, while Venice, on the other hand, was a revisionist power.⁴⁴ To be fair, scholars using the behavioral approach should have also critiqued Bartolus or, at the very least, included a critical note regarding the classification of Venice as a middle power.

This “trend” has also had some impact on research regarding Indonesian middlepowermanship. We have conducted a review of current research related to Indonesia as a middle power and its behavior in international politics. Using VOSviewer analysis on titles and abstracts from 1,618 articles indexed on Google Scholars, with the keywords “middle power,” “middle-power,” and “middle powers,” we found that Indonesia has not received

⁴³ Carsten Holbraad. *Middle powers in international politics*. London: Macmillan, (1984): 11.

⁴⁴ Francesco Guicciardini. “The History of Italy,” in *Basic Texts in International Relations the Evolution of Ideas about International Society*, Evan Luard, ed. London: Macmillan, (1992) 380-383.

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Figure 2. A density visualization of studies on middle power between the years 1980-2000 using VOSviewer

However, using the same method and parameters, it is evident that between the years 2000 and 2020, the term “Indonesia” appeared 42 times in 1,000 articles indexed by Google Scholars. Moreover, Indonesia falls under the largest cluster of “Middle Power” alongside other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Australia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam (See Figure 3). Meanwhile, the term “Indonesia” is closely associated with other concepts such as “middle power status,” “middle power diplomacy,” “middle power state,” “middle power concept,” “regional middle power,” and “niche diplomacy” (See figure 4). This data indicates that Indonesia

started to be considered a middle power in the academic field in the year 2000 and beyond.

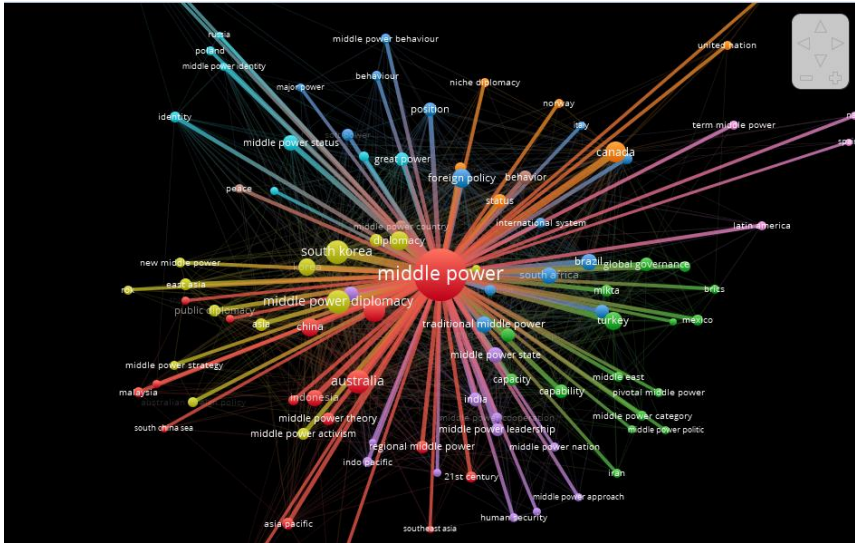


Figure 3. A network visualization of studies on middle power between the years 2000-2020 using VOSviewer (the biggest cluster ‘Middle Power’)

behavioral patterns that reflect support for the established liberal world order, whereas, in fact, middle powers “do not have a common attribute as functionalists or of being good international citizens or of having a preference for multilateralism, and they cannot be identified by their behavior alone.” In light of this, Ping concludes that Indonesia, as a natural middle power, behaves as a “natural” revisionist power, with its style encompassing “self-serving, anti-hegemonic, bad international citizenship, threats, rogue behavior, blackmail and thuggery.” The present article, while generally echoing Ping’s argument, takes a slightly different stance by proposing that Indonesia is not a “full” revisionist power but rather a “limited-aims” revisionist state, which will be explored further in the following section.

There are two common patterns in the current studies on Indonesian middlepowermanship: firstly, scholars tend to overlook the historical part of Indonesia’s foreign policy under President Sukarno, a period where Indonesia represented itself as a revisionist middle power; secondly, selective cases of Indonesia’s middlepowermanship supporting the status-quo are often exaggerated. When discussing Indonesia’s activism in the international arena, scholars seem to start with the dawn of the New Order era while ignoring the country’s revolutionary

expression of foreign policy during Sukarno’s era.⁴⁷ The study conducted by Thies and Sari,⁴⁸ for instance, while covering Indonesia’s roles as a middle power throughout its historical trajectory, deliberately excludes the Sukarno era. By doing so, it is assumed that general patterns of Indonesian roles, as a supporter of multilateralism, a good international citizen, and a supporter of the international order, can be established. Thies and Sari acknowledged the challenge of classifying middle powers based on specific roles, given that Indonesia displayed different styles under different presidents. However, instead of reconciling with this diversity, they “kicked” Indonesia under Sukarno out of middle power status, as they suggested:

“...countries like Indonesia may sometimes fulfill the expectations of a middle power while at other times they will not... Sukarno was unable to fulfill the role of a supporter of multilateralism. Subsequent Indonesian presidents vacillated with this auxiliary role, thus casting some doubt about Indonesia as a fully established middle power.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Rizal Sukma. “Domestic Politics and International Posture: Constraints and Possibilities,” in *Indonesia Rising: The Repositioning of Asia’s Third Giant*, Anthony Reid, ed. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, (2012): 77-92.

⁴⁸ Thies and Sari, “A Role Theory Approach,” 397-421.

⁴⁹ Thies and Sari, “A Role Theory Approach,” 413.

Similarly, a study conducted by Wicaksana suggests a general pattern of Indonesia's foreign policy characterized as an "order-maker."⁵⁰ Once again, Indonesia's foreign policy under Sukarno is overlooked since it does not align with the role proposed in the article. Sukarno is indeed not a suitable example of an "order-maker" as he pursued foreign policies in a contradictory manner. Instead of creating a stable regional order, Sukarno chose to "shake the calm water" by conducting *Konfrontasi* against Malaysia in 1963.⁵¹ Indonesia's revisionism under Sukarno is considered an anomaly since, in most cases, Jakarta has played the role of a good international citizen obedient to international order, especially when it comes to resolving international disputes in the region. It seems that the history of Indonesia's foreign policy, particularly as a middle power, is often seen as beginning with the triumph of Suharto and the establishment of a multilateral organization known as ASEAN in 1967.⁵² Before that, Indonesia was often viewed as a "status-less" regional giant power with problematic behaviors.⁵³

⁵⁰ Wicaksana, "The family state," 2.

⁵¹ Joseph Chinyong Liow. *The politics of Indonesia-Malaysia relations: one kin, two nations*. New York: Routledgecurzon, (2004): 98.

⁵² Mark Beeson, Alan Bloomfield, and Wahyu Wicaksana. "Unlikely allies? Australia, Indonesia and the strategic cultures of middle powers," *Asian Security* (2020): 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2020.1846525>.

⁵³ Dewi Fortuna Anwar. "Indonesia and the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific," *International Affairs* 96, No. 1 (2020): 111–129. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz223>.

Another way to come up with a solid concept of Indonesian middlepowermanship is to selectively choose specific cases under particular presidents that coincidentally exhibited a status quo supporting role. Indonesia can be described as a status-quo middle power, particularly during President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s (SBY) administration. During SBY’s leadership, Indonesia was observed to play certain roles, such as that of a democracy promoter.⁵⁴ Within this role, Indonesia appeared to push ASEAN towards becoming a more rules-based organization, especially in two key areas: democratization and the promotion of human rights. Studies conducted by Acharya⁵⁵ and Grzywacz⁵⁶ covered a wide range of Indonesia’s multilateral tendencies in its foreign policy. By doing so, Indonesian presidents, especially SBY, aimed to position the state as an exemplar of a “good international citizen,” which was reflected in SBY’s slogan of “a million friends and zero enemies.” Emmerson argued that, rather than following an analyst’s suggestion to shift toward a more bilateral approach to pursue its national interests, SBY preferred

⁵⁴ Karim, “Role conflict,” 385–404.

⁵⁵ Acharya, *Indonesia Matters*.

⁵⁶ Anna Grzywacz. “The authoritarian turn of middle powers: changes in narratives and engagement,” *Third World Quarterly* (2021): 1-22.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1960159>.

to “envision a tactful, eclectic and multilateralist foreign policy that offered all things – good things – to all people.”⁵⁷

This case reveals, as Cooper said, the “definitional sleight of hand,” which methodologically equals the analogy he mentions in his article: “walking into a bar, designating everyone with blonde hair who is drinking red wine as a discretionary subset of the broader blonde category, and then studying only this subgroup to explicate the causal relationship of blondeness and drinking behavior, having first speculated that blondes inherently tend to favor red wine!”⁵⁸ The methodological bias in middle power theorizing will be explored in the following section.

III. Bringing back revisionist middle powers

During the Cold War, international relations scholars predominantly focused on the foreign behavior of great powers. Some of the earliest works on great powers include the studies by Segal and Harkavy,⁵⁹ which examined the competition between China, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Other works

⁵⁷ Donald K. Emmerson. “Is Indonesia Rising: It Depends,” in *Indonesia Rising: The Repositioning of Asia’s Third Giant*, Anthony Reid, ed. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, (2012): 49-76.

⁵⁸ David A. Cooper. “Challenging Contemporary Notions of Middle Power Influence: Implications of the Proliferation Security Initiative for ‘Middle Power Theory,’” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7, No. 3 (2011): 322.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2011.00140.x>.

⁵⁹ Robert E. Harkavy. *Great power competition for overseas bases: the geopolitics of access diplomacy*. New York: Pergamon Press, (1982).
<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-025089-2.50007-2>.

sought to understand international relations by analyzing wars through the lens of great power rivalry.⁶⁰ It was only with the work of Organski that a framework for comprehending states' foreign policy tendencies in a hierarchical system was provided. In this framework, states are categorized into two groups: satisfied (status quo) and dissatisfied (revisionist).⁶¹ At the top of this hierarchical order is the satisfied dominant power, which holds the greatest amount of power. Below it are the great powers, which are generally considered supporters of the status quo, although some may challenge the international order. Following the great powers are the middle and small powers. Even during peaceful and stable times, there can still be dissatisfied states among the group of middle powers, depending on their degree of satisfaction with the international order.⁶²

It's important to note that the presence of more status-quo middle powers doesn't mean that revisionist middle powers are entirely absent. History has shown that even some of the greatest great power rivalries, like the one between Sparta and Athens

⁶⁰ See for example the works of Jack S. Levy. *War in the modern great power systems, 1495-1975*. Lexington (Ky.): University Press of Kentucky, (1983); H. W. Koch. *The Origins of the First World War*. London: Macmillan, (1984); Paul Kennedy. *The Rise and Fall of The Great Powers: economic change and military conflict from 1500-2000*. London: Unwyn Hyman, (1989), and John J. Mearsheimer. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: Norton & Company, (2001).

⁶¹ Organski, *World Politics*.

⁶² Jack Kugler and A.F.K. Organski. "The power transition: A retrospective and prospective evaluation," in *Handbook of War Studies*, Manus I. Midlarsky, ed. London: Routledge, (1989): 171-194.

from 431 to 404 BC, can be viewed from the perspective of status quo versus revisionist rivalry. Furthermore, these rivalries often involved not only the major powers but also middle powers, such as Corinth and Corcyra, which were eventually “compelled” to ally with either Sparta or Athens and took on either a status quo or revisionist stance.⁶³ Similarly, the “local” balance of power in 14th-century Italy was also characterized by a rivalry between two poles of middle powers – status-quo Florence and revisionist Venice. In modern European international relations, numerous great power rivalries have involved “middle powers” that played roles as either status-quo or revisionist supporters.⁶⁴

The problem now is to understand the nature of the revisionism that middle powers perform. Since middle powers fall below great or major powers, their revisionist tendencies are also confined to areas in which they have the capability to exert influence. For the purpose of the study, we refer to Schweller’s typology on revisionist states, which is divided into two categories: unlimited-aims (revolutionary) and limited-aims revisionist.⁶⁵ Unlimited-aims revisionist states are typically great powers that seek to gain more power. Highly dissatisfied, they

⁶³ Thucydides, Richard Crawley, and Robert B. Strassler. *The landmark Thucydides: a comprehensive guide to the Peloponnesian War: a newly revised edition of the Richard Crawley translation with maps, annotations, appendices, and encyclopedic index*. New York: Free Press, (2008).

⁶⁴ Graham Allison. *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, (2017).

⁶⁵ Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit,” 72-107.

aim to overthrow the established international order. On the other hand, limited-aims revisionist states are often middle powers that are somewhat dissatisfied with the status quo but have little intention and certainly lack the capability to change it. As Schweller suggests, “While all revolutionary states are dissatisfied, not all dissatisfied states are revolutionary.”⁶⁶ When the status quo still provides benefits, even if they are dissatisfied, limited-aims revisionist states would prefer to preserve and, in some cases, even strengthen the established order rather than disrupt it. These types of revisionist states are referred to as “Jackals,” as they perform certain characteristics of a “secondary” predator:

“Jackals are states that will pay high costs to defend their possessions but even greater costs to extend their values. Like wolves, jackals are dissatisfied powers, but they value their possessions, and so as expanders, they tend to be risk-averse and opportunistic... While jackals are often found trailing wolves (revisionist leaders), they will also trail lions (status-quo leaders) who are on the verge of victory.”⁶⁷

By borrowing Schweller’s model of “Jackal” revisionist states, we propose “Jackal middle power” to describe Indonesian

⁶⁶ Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit,” 29.

⁶⁷ Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit,” 103.

middlepowermanship. This attempt would relieve the conceptual bias proposed by the behavioral approach and bring revisionist states back to middle power theory. Additionally, this attempt would also alleviate conceptual incoherence from the behavioral approach by eliminating exhausting efforts in defining middle power – “traditional” vs. “emerging” middle powers, or the “first,” “second,” and “third” waves of middle powers.

Bringing back Indonesia’s revisionist tendencies is essential to capture the whole picture of its foreign policy, particularly in the context of its middlepowermanship. This raises a significant question, echoing Gareth Evans: if Indonesia ceases to behave as a status-quo supporter, does it also cease to be a middle power? More specifically, during Sukarno’s leadership, when anti-colonialism and contra-hegemony strongly influenced the state’s foreign policy, does this mean Indonesia was not a middle power at that time? If not, then what category of power would Indonesia fall into? While it is clear that Indonesia under Sukarno was not a great power, considering its size, population, and military strength,⁶⁸ it raises the question of whether it can be classified as a small power solely because it was a revisionist state.

⁶⁸ In the early 1960’s Indonesia was considered as the strongest sea power in the southern hemisphere. With the military support from Soviet, Indonesia managed to deter the Dutch navy and settling the Western Papua issue through dialogue rather than direct military confrontation. See Daoed Joesoef. *Studi Strategi: Logika Ketahanan dan Pembangunan Nasional*. Jakarta: Kompas Media Nusantara, (2014): 104-105.

IV. Indonesia as “Jackal middle power”

This section delves into the “other side” of Indonesian middlepowermanship, specifically its revisionist foreign policy tendencies. These tendencies can be examined through two variables borrowed from Schweller’s Balance of Interest theory: dissatisfaction with the status quo and an inclination towards bandwagoning with the rising powers. We call Indonesia’s middlepowermanship “Jackal middle power,” which denotes opportunistic revisionist-like foreign policy behaviors driven primarily by national interest, as Schweller suggests. Within this framework, Indonesia has never been a “fully” or revolutionary revisionist power, primarily due to its middle-ranked economic and military capabilities. Similar to the niche diplomacy of status-quo middle powers, Indonesia’s limited-aims revisionist foreign policy has not aimed to confront the status-quo leaders directly or change the established order, as that typically falls under the purview of unlimited-aims revisionist powers. Instead, it involves filling the “niche” left by revisionist leaders to advance its national interests.

Indonesia under Sukarno serves as the most suitable example of a “Jackal middle power.” Two key issues will be emphasized: Sukarno’s ideas of “Jakarta, Phnom Penh, Hanoi, Peking, and Pyongyang” anti-imperial axis, and *Konfrontasi* policy directed towards a new state of Federation of Malaysia. Sukarno’s idea of

building an anti-imperial axis of Jakarta, Phnom Penh, Hanoi, Peking, and Pyongyang was a result of his (re)reading of Indonesia's "Independent" foreign policy. According to him, "Independent" from the "Independent and Active" foreign policy did indeed mean not taking sides between two poles during the Cold War, yet it also did not hinder from "firmly choosing the side of the progressive, anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist, anti-neocolonialist forces."⁶⁹ Sukarno, inspired by the success of Eastern European "people democratic" states in breaking free from imperial entanglements with the assistance of the Soviet Red Army, advocated for the establishment of the revisionist axis mentioned earlier. He referred to the revisionist powers as New Emerging Forces (NEFOS) while labeling the Western status-quo powers as Old Established Forces (OLDEFOS). Sukarno's revisionist stance was rooted in the belief that joining the stronger side of the status-quo powers was not only undesirable but also dangerous, and thus, aligning with the NEFOS offered a more promising alternative. This highlights Sukarno's commitment to challenging the established order and advancing the interests of emerging and revisionist powers. As he implied from a speech in Belgrade, "The safety of the world is always threatened by the Old Established Order."⁷⁰ That is why, for Sukarno, being neutral was not the essence of "Independent" foreign policy, yet, on the

⁶⁹ Franklin B. Weinstein. *Indonesian foreign policy and the dilemma of dependence: from Sukarno to Soeharto*. Jakarta: Equinox, (2007).

⁷⁰ J. D. Legge. *Sukarno: A Political Biography*. Singapore: Archipelago, (2004).

contrary, the violation of the principle, just as Weinstein suggested:

“Because the NEFOS were by definition opposed to exploitation, siding with them was seen not as a violation of the independent policy, but on the contrary as the only way to be truly independent, a policy that forced Indonesia to remain neutral in the struggle between NEFOS and OLDEFOS would mean acceptance of the exploitative status quo [emphasis added].”⁷¹

Another significant revisionist action undertaken by Sukarno was the *Konfrontasi* policy directed toward the Federation of Malaysia. This policy was driven by various motives;⁷² one of the primary ones was Sukarno’s desire to replicate the success of deterring the Dutch from taking West Papua. In 1963, Sukarno declared his intention to “liberate” the people of Malaysia from what he perceived as neo-imperialism. He believed himself to be the leader of post-colonial nations and saw it as his noble duty to eliminate the remnants of European imperialism from Southeast Asia.⁷³ From the perspective of NEFOS-OLDEFOS dynamics, the formation of the new Federation of Malaysia was viewed as a

⁷¹ Weinstein, *Indonesian foreign policy*, 167.

⁷² Liow, *The politics*.

⁷³ John Subritzky, *Confronting Sukarno: British, American, Australian and New Zealand diplomacy in the Malaysian-Indonesian confrontation, 1961-5*. New York: St. Martin Press, (2000).

move that would bolster the presence of status-quo powers in the region. Sukarno saw this development as a potential threat to his nationalism-based agendas. He expressed his intention to “crush Malaysia” (*ganyang Malaysia*) because, in his view, it was Malaysia that was provoking the confrontation, and this was perceived as a direct “confrontation against the Indonesian Revolution.”⁷⁴ Sukarno also believed that Malaysia’s alignment with the status-quo powers could trigger a “domino effect” in the region. This would not only place Indonesia in the middle of an OLDEFOS alliance but also undermine its position as the leader of NEFOS. Faced with this situation, Sukarno felt compelled to take a stance, and aligning with the status-quo powers was not even considered an option for him. His revisionist stance was deeply rooted in his commitment to preserving Indonesia’s interests and challenging the established order.

The current Indonesian President, Joko Widodo, is considered to bring back Sukarno-style foreign policy.⁷⁵ Although not as aggressive as Sukarno’s approach, experts have noted a shift in Jokowi’s foreign policy compared to his

⁷⁴ Legge, *Sukarno*, 369.

⁷⁵ David Camroux. “Executions signal a return to Sukarno-style foreign policy in Indonesia,” *East Asia Forum*, May 12, (2015).

<https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/05/12/executions-signal-a-return-to-sukarno-era-foreign-policy-in-indonesia>.

predecessor.⁷⁶ One of the most noticeable changes was the abandonment of SBY’s foreign policy slogan, “a thousand friends, zero enemies,”⁷⁷ in favor of a foreign policy that places a greater emphasis on state sovereignty and maritime development.⁷⁸ SBY’s slogan was regarded as “impractical” and “helpless” when it came to managing the interests of a nation in competition with great powers. Consequently, at the East Asia Summit in Nay Pyi Taw in 2014, Jokowi outlined his vision for Indonesia as the “world maritime axis,” based on five main pillars: rebuilding Indonesia’s maritime culture, guarding and managing maritime resources, with a focus on building marine food sovereignty; giving priority to the development of maritime infrastructure and

⁷⁶ See Prashanth Parameswaran. “Between Aspiration and Reality: Indonesian Foreign Policy After the 2014 Elections,” *The Washington Quarterly* 37, No. 3 (2014): 153-165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2014.978441> ; and Aaron L. Connelly. “Sovereignty and the Sea: President Joko Widodo’s Foreign Policy Challenges,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 37, No. 1 (2015): 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1355/cs37-1a>.

⁷⁷ SBY used the term ‘a thousand...’ and ‘a million...’ interchangeably.

⁷⁸ Icha Rastika. “Wapres JK: Diplomasi ‘Zero Enemy’ Itu Mustahil [Vice President JK: “Zero Enemy” Diplomacy is Impossible],” *Kompas*, March 5, 2015.

<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2015/03/05/06531511/Wapres.JK.Diplomasi.Zero.Enemy.Itu.Mustahil>.

connectivity, strengthening maritime diplomacy, and establishing a maritime defense force.⁷⁹

Just as Sukarno's, Jokowi's revisionist "gestures" are primarily shown in the forms of inclination towards unilateral acts and bilateral foreign relations. Those tendencies are observable when it comes to maritime disputes with neighboring countries. When Indonesia perceives a threat to its national identity as a maritime nation, it tends to prioritize unilateral actions over multilateral approaches.⁸⁰ Two cases of maritime disputes illustrate this approach: the territorial dispute with Malaysia in Ambalat waters and the maritime rights dispute with China in the South China Sea concerning the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). During Jokowi's administration, the Ambalat issue did not receive as much media attention as it did under the previous president, SBY. This was largely attributed to Jokowi's firm stance on defending Indonesia's territorial integrity, which included deploying military forces to the border areas of North Kalimantan,

⁷⁹ Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia. "Pidato Presiden RI Joko Widodo Pada KTT ke-9 Asia Timur, di Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar [Speech of Indonesian President Joko Widodo at the 9th East Asia Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar]," November 14, 2014.

<https://setkab.go.id/pidato-presiden-ri-joko-widodo-pada-ktt-ke-9-asia-timur-di-nay-pyi-taw-myanmar-13-november-2014/>.

⁸⁰ Dion Maulana Prasetya, Peggy Puspa Haffsari and Heavy Nala Estriani.

"Identity Matters: Indonesia's approach towards territorial disputes in South-east Asia," *Maritime Affairs* 16, No. 2 (2020): 89-105.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09733159.2020.1836775>.

including the Ambalat waters.⁸¹ Jokowi’s inclination toward a unilateral approach was evident when Indonesian Navy warships were sent to protect the construction of a lighthouse in the Karang Unarang waters.⁸² This assertive policy was intended to send a strong message to Kuala Lumpur that Indonesia, under Jokowi’s leadership, would not be “soft” in addressing territorial disputes, in contrast to the previous administration.⁸³

Similarly, Jokowi’s assertive stance in the South China Sea dispute shows a sign of revisionist tendency. This is not to argue that confronting China in the sea is a form of balancing against Beijing. The argument is that Indonesia’s revisionist tendency is shown by the approach that it chose, which is more likely to avoid the multilateral approach. While the multilateral dialogue between ASEAN and China had been slowly progressing during SBY’s government, Jokowi’s administration has shown impatience with China’s claims in the South China Sea. This is demonstrated by

⁸¹ Emirza Adi Syailendra. “A Nonbalancing Act: Explaining Indonesia’s Failure to Balance Against the Chinese Threat,” *Asian Security* 13, No. 3 (2017): 11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2017.1365489>.

⁸² Sukoco. “TNI AL: Tentara Laut Malaysia Bayang-bayangi Suar Karang Unarang [Indonesian Navy: The Malaysian Navy haunts the shores of Karang Unarang],” *Kompas*, July 13, 2017. <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2017/07/13/01455221/tni-al--tentara-laut-malaysia-bayang-bayangi-suar-karang-unarang->.

⁸³ Liputan 6 SCTV. “Pembangunan Mercusuar Karang Unarang Dihentikan Sementara [The construction of the Karang Unarang lighthouse has been temporarily halted].” March 6, 2005. <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/96983/pembangunan-mercusuar-karang-unarang-dihentikan-sementar>.

Indonesia's potential consideration of bringing the case to the International Criminal Court⁸⁴ and building up a more advanced military base in the Natuna Islands.⁸⁵ This unilateral stance taken by the Jokowi administration can be seen as a significant shift in Indonesia's foreign policy. While the previous government worked hard to ensure the success of the multilateral channel, the current government seeks a new approach that does not compromise Indonesia's national interests. Although Indonesia still normatively places ASEAN as the cornerstone of its foreign policy, there is a clear indication that Indonesia is moving toward a "post-ASEAN" foreign policy.⁸⁶ As progress on the ASEAN Code of Conduct (CoC)⁸⁷ appears to be stalling, member states,

⁸⁴ The statement was originally said by the former coordinating minister for political, legal, and security affairs, Luhut Pandjaitan. He himself said that Indonesia may potentially bring the case to the International Criminal Court, while he actually meant the International Court of Justice or even the Permanent Court of Arbitration. See Shannon Tiezzi. "Would Indonesia Actually Challenge China's Nine-Dash Line in International Court?" *The Diplomat*, November 13, 2015.

<https://thediplomat.com/2015/11/would-indonesia-actually-challenge-chinas-nine-dash-line-in-international-court/>; Donald E. Weatherbee. "Re-Assessing Indonesia's Role in the South China Sea," *ISEAS Perspective* 18 (2016): 1-13.

⁸⁵ John McBeth. "Indonesia boosts its military presence in the Natuna Islands," *The Strategist*, January 29, 2019.

<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/indonesia-boosts-its-military-presence-in-the-natuna-islands>.

⁸⁶ Sukma, "Domestic Politics and International Posture," 77-92.

⁸⁷ Code of Conduct is a multilateral norms building aimed to bring unity between ASEAN's claimant and non-claimant member states and to restrain China's assertive behaviour in the South China Sea. See Leszek Buszynski. "ASEAN, the Declaration on Conduct, and the South China Sea," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 25, No. 3 (2003): 250-251.

including Indonesia, are exploring unilateral approaches to address China’s assertive behavior in the disputed area.⁸⁸

Jokowi’s stance on the South China Sea issue, including his statements during the 2014 presidential debate, reflects a shift away from relying on ASEAN as the primary multilateral channel to address the conflict. During the debate, Jokowi downplayed Indonesia’s involvement in the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, emphasizing that Indonesia has no territorial dispute with China in the area. He also suggested that the disputes mainly involve China and the Philippines.⁸⁹ This shift has become more evident during Jokowi’s presidency, and Indonesia’s ASEAN chairmanship in September 2023 didn’t yield significant progress toward the Code of Conduct (CoC) in the South China Sea. Indonesia also chose to remain relatively silent about the China Coast Guard’s provocative actions toward Vietnamese vessels and the Philippines Coast Guard in August and September, indicating

⁸⁸ Viet Hoang. “The Code of Conduct for the South China Sea: A Long and Bumpy Road,” *The Diplomat*, September 28, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/the-code-of-conduct-for-the-south-china-sea-a-long-and-bumpy-road/>.

⁸⁹ “Fatal Jokowi Tak Paham Konflik Natuna Di Laut China Selatan [Fatal, Jokowi Does Not Understand the Natuna Conflict in South China Sea],” *Merdeka.com*, June 23, 2014. <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/fatal-jokowi-tak-paham-konflik-natuna-di-laut-china-selatan.html>.

a reluctance to confront China through multilateral diplomacy.⁹⁰ These actions further emphasize Indonesia's move toward a more unilateral approach in addressing the South China Sea issue, which aligns with its revisionist-like foreign policy tendencies.

Yohanes Sulaiman's argument regarding Jokowi's foreign policy approach toward China in the South China Sea as an underbalancing act is a valid interpretation based on Schweller's neo-classical realism. Sulaiman suggests that Indonesia's response to China's actions in the region falls short of effectively countering the perceived threat.⁹¹ In contrast, this article takes a broader perspective and interprets Indonesia's bilateral strategy toward China as an abandonment of multilateralism in resolving international disputes, particularly in the context of the South China Sea. The key distinction lies in the approach to conflict resolution. Multilateral channels, such as ASEAN, require consensus among member states, making decision-making complex and often difficult to achieve. In contrast, bilateralism provides more flexibility, as decisions can be made directly by the president, thus circumventing the need for consensus among multiple parties. This shift toward bilateralism suggests a

⁹⁰ Chetra Chap. "ASEAN Remains Divided over China's Assertiveness in South China Sea," *VOA*, September 12, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/asean-remains-divided-over-china-s-assertiveness-in-south-china-sea/7264923.html>.

⁹¹ Yohanes Sulaiman. "What Threat? Leadership, Strategic Culture, and Indonesian Foreign Policy in the South China Sea." *Asian Politics & Policy* 11, No. 4 (2019): 606-622.

departure from Indonesia’s previous multilateral approach and aligns with the country’s revisionist-like foreign policy tendencies. The replacement of Susi Pudjiastuti from her position as the Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries during the second term of Jokowi’s presidency can be seen as a clear sign that Indonesia is placing more emphasis on economic cooperation rather than maintaining an aggressive stance in its behavior toward China in the disputed areas, such as the South China Sea. This shift in approach was accompanied by several notable developments. For instance, Vice President Jusuf Kalla and the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime and Investment Affairs publicly expressed their disagreement with Susi’s “seize and sink” policy in the North Natuna Sea. This policy was perceived as potentially damaging to Indonesia’s good relationships with neighboring countries, including China.⁹² It is not even surprising, considering the fact that China is the biggest source of foreign direct investment in Indonesia, just below Singapore and Hongkong, as well as the largest trading partner with growing imports from Indonesia by 34.2% in the first half of 2022.⁹³

⁹² Moh Nadlir. “Wapres Minta Menteri Susi Hentikan Penenggelaman Kapal [Vice President Asked Minister Susi To Stop Sinking Vessels].” *Kompas*, January 9, 2018.

<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/01/09/17501971/wapres-minta-menteri-susi-hentikan-penenggelaman-kapal?page=al>.

⁹³ “China, Indonesia hail “win-win” cooperation after rare Beijing summit,” *Reuters*, July 26, 2022.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinas-xi-hold-talks-with-indonesia-s-jokowi-rare-visit-2022-07-26/>.

It is the economic advantages from China's growing investment in Indonesia rather than the "indirect threats" posed by China in the South China Sea that make Jakarta overlook its former role as a status-quo supporter. As a "Jackal" middle power, Indonesia perceives that bandwagoning with China for economic profits is preferable to strengthening multilateral cooperations and answering the threat by balancing Beijing. This is visible when we see how close the bilateral relations between Indonesia and China are, marked by more than ten times both official and non-official meetings since Jokowi took office in 2014.⁹⁴ Jokowi's recent visit to Beijing, seen as a rare event due to the limited high-level international travel amid the COVID-19 pandemic, highlights the importance of Indonesia's relationship with China. Jokowi's visit to China, along with other world leaders like Putin, underscores the significance of their bilateral ties. Taking a closer look at this, another clear signal can be seen from The Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan's visit to Beijing, proposing a new megaproject of food estate on April 4, 2023.⁹⁵ Additionally, Luhut also claimed to bring back a US\$560 million loan from the

⁹⁴ Chandra Asmara. "Bukti Mesranya Jokowi - Xi Jinping, Bukan Cuma Sering Ketemu!" *CNBC Indonesia*, July, 25 (2022).
<https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20220725134505-4-358306/bukti-mesranya-jokowi--xi-jinping-bukan-cuma-sering-ketemu>.

⁹⁵ Mahinda Arkyasa. "Indonesian Minister Luhut Visits China for Collaboration in Food Estate," *Tempo*, April 11, 2023.
<https://en.tempo.co/read/1713444/indonesian-minister-luhut-visits-china-for-collaboration-in-food-estate>.

China Development Bank (CDB), which some part will be used to cover the cost-overrun of the high-speed railway project.⁹⁶ It is very clear to see that Jokowi, at the end of his leadership, extremely needs economic development as a means to materialize his ambition to make Indonesia the fourth most powerful country and the fifth biggest economy by 2045.⁹⁷ And to make this dream come true, we argue, Indonesia chose to bandwagon with China, the rising power, rather than keep it close to the declining superpower.

V. Conclusions

This study does not offer a new theoretical framework for Indonesia’s middlepowermanship. Instead, it fills the gap by problematizing status-quo bias in existing studies and explores Indonesia’s revisionist tendencies within its middlepowermanship. Moreover, it does not argue that Indonesia is a revisionist middle power per se. Instead, Indonesia’s foreign policy has never been “black and white” – it has always swung like a pendulum between status quo and revisionist power. Another study regarding the

⁹⁶ The Jakarta Post. “Luhut Brings Back Deals on Railways, Industrial Park from Beijing Trip,” *The Jakarta Post*, April 11, (2023). <https://www.thejakartapost.com/business/2023/04/11/luhut-brings-back-deals-on-railways-industrial-park-from-beijing-trip.html>.

⁹⁷ Friski Riana. “Jokowi’s Vision for Indonesia: World’s Largest Economy by 2045,” *Tempo*, May 9, (2022). <https://en.tempo.co/read/1203633/jokowis-vision-for-indonesia-worlds-largest-economy-by-2045>.

theorization of Indonesian middlepowermanship still needs to be conducted in the future – particularly in explaining how and when Indonesia transitions between a status quo stance and a revisionist one. Applying Alastair Iain Johnston’s concept of strategic culture may be suitable for elucidating the changes in Indonesian middlepowermanship over time.⁹⁸

The findings suggest that while adopting a status-quo stance has been a dominant aspect of Indonesian middlepowermanship, its revisionist tendencies should not be disregarded, as they have played a role in shaping and continuing to shape Indonesian foreign policy. However, it’s important to note that Indonesia’s revisionist tendencies should not be analyzed through the lens of ‘revolutionary’ revisionist states. As Indonesia is a middle power with limited material capabilities, its revisionist actions are also confined to specific areas of interest or geographical contexts. In other words, feelings of dissatisfaction are likely to arise when the status quo threatens Indonesia’s territorial integrity or fails to provide a security umbrella against ‘predatory’ states with intentions of violating Indonesia’s territory. However, in situations where the status quo still offers advantages, despite their dissatisfaction, as Schweller suggests, limited-aims revisionist states tend to preserve and, in some cases, even strengthen the established order rather than attempting to disrupt it.

⁹⁸ Alastair I Johnston. *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, (1995).

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