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# Indonesia's Foreign Policy Perspective on the Gulf's Security Architecture

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## Abstract

**Key words:**  
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*Indonesia and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states have developed thick and complex ties in recent years. Despite the importance of economic relationships in developing these partnerships, cooperation has also expanded into the cultural and security areas. The volatility of the Gulf region is one of the concerns among the expanding contacts. In addition to its internal conflicts, the region is bordered by the worst conflicts in the world. Moreover, due to its key geographic location and vast oil resources, it has become a battleground for major power rivalry. This article discusses how Indonesia's foreign policy towards the region has taken into account the security and stability of the Gulf in light of its developing contacts with the region. Even though Indonesia is paying increased attention to the security circumstances of the Gulf to secure the continuity of its collaboration, the security situation in the region has negligible impact on Indonesia-Gulf relations, according to the findings of this study.*

## Introduction

Prince Mohammed bin Zayed of the United Arab Emirates opened a roadway in Abu Dhabi's diplomatic area that bears the name of Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, the current president of Indonesia. This street travels through the embassy district. The UAE government announced the decision to name a street after Jokowi to recognize the Indonesian government's efforts to strengthen bilateral ties with the UAE. The current incident was the most recent illustration of the expanding connections between Indonesia and the Gulf states. Indonesia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states have maintained deep and multifaceted contacts in recent years despite being located at opposite ends of Asia. The scope of collaboration has broadened from economic to cultural and security domains (M. Z. Rakhmat, 2021).

Due to their 'Look East' policy and the increasing instability in the region, Gulf countries have sought to deepen ties with Asian nations such as China, Japan, and ASEAN nations. Indonesia's geographical position as the largest economy in Southeast Asia and a major member of the G20 has enticed the GCC nations to deepen their collaboration. In addition to being an attractive investment destination, Indonesia's population of over 250 million makes it an interesting consumer market for Gulf goods. Moreover, its geographical location offers the Gulf states an opportunity to expand their footprint in the greater Asia-Pacific area. The GCC has sought alternate partners in light of any probable economic slump in China, the United States, and Europe due to Beijing's trade conflict with Washington and the COVID-19 epidemic. Indonesia appears on the list.

The Gulf offers Indonesia not only access to unexplored export markets and profitable investment prospects. In addition, it can act as a hub for economic growth in the Gulf and the wider Middle East. Indonesia is the largest economy in Southeast Asia, but it still needs to attract billions of

dollars in investments to develop its economy, increase growth, and reduce unemployment. In addition, a long-standing anti-Chinese sentiment, which has intensified in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, has posed challenges for China as one of Indonesia's top investors. Therefore, Indonesia views strengthening ties with other Muslim-majority nations in the Middle East as a safer alternative. As a result of the China-US trade war, some companies have chosen Southeast Asian states over China as their operational base. Nevertheless, few have chosen Indonesia, allowing Indonesia to advance its relations with the Gulf.

While expanding cooperation, regional instability in the Gulf is a concern. Since the end of the Second World War, the region has been plagued by internal strife and surrounded by the world's worst wars. In addition, due to its key geographical location and vast oil resources, it has become a battleground for Western and Eastern countries. Therefore, this article tries to investigate how the security and stability of the Gulf figure as variables in Indonesia's regional foreign policy calculations. To achieve this objective, the report will initially trace the evolution of collaboration between Indonesia and the Gulf. The report will then investigate how Indonesian foreign policymakers view regional security in the Gulf and how Gulf-Iran tensions and GCC conflicts factor into Indonesia's regional strategy. The study then analyzes the consequences of Indonesia's relationship with the United States on the former's approach to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and how intra-regional Asian competition for Gulf energy resources may emerge as a new regional dynamic. Even though Indonesia's foreign policy has examined the regional security developments in the Gulf, which have played a role in several regional concerns, the Gulf's security situation has minimal bearing on the collaboration between Indonesia and Gulf countries, the report concludes.

## Literature Review

### Indonesia and The Gulf Relations

Historiographically, links between Indonesia and the Arab World date back to the 13th century, when immigrants from the Hadhramaut region arrived. Indonesia was focused on its domestic politics and wanted to retain ties with its traditional partners, such as the United States and China, from the 1950s through the early 2010s (M. Rakhmat, 2016). Under President Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo, who assumed power in 2014, relations between Indonesia and the Gulf began to blossom. Jokowi's state visit to the three GCC member states in September 2015, namely Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, underlined how important the GCC has become to Indonesia's foreign policy.

According to Saunders (2022) commerce and investments between Indonesia and the Gulf have increased. Given Indonesia's depleting energy supplies, the energy industry has dominated the cooperation. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), ASEAN countries, including

Indonesia, must invest \$705 billion between 2013 and 2035 to supply fossil fuels. According to the Central Statistics Agency, Indonesia's crude oil imports between January and November amounted to \$4.29 billion, of which \$2.11 billion came from Saudi Arabia (Setiaji, 2020). Various projects by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, Saudi Aramco, Nebras Power, and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company have increased the GCC countries' energy investments in Indonesia during the past few years (ADNOC). In addition to investing in maritime infrastructure to support their oil and gas exploration and refining projects with Indonesia, the GCC states have also invested in maritime infrastructure. At the same time, Indonesian firms have expanded their presence in the energy sectors of the GCC.

Beyond the energy industry, recent developments in Indonesia's relations with the GCC have centered on investment and trade cooperation. In Jakarta's view, the United States' diminishing position in Southeast Asia and China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea necessitate a search for non-traditional security partners overseas; the GCC appears to be a viable option. In addition, it can act as a hub for economic growth in the Gulf and the greater Middle East (M. Z. R. Rakhmat, Juan, F. T. V., Pashya, M. H., Septianie, N., & Purnama, Y, 2021). The GCC trade volume surged 40 percent between 2016 and 2018, rising from \$8.68 billion to \$12.5 billion (Pramudyani, 2019). While the Gulf countries export largely energy resources to Indonesia, Indonesia sends automobiles and their spare parts, as well as wood, furniture, paper, palm oil, agricultural goods, and processed seafood products, to the GCC. Investments have also been pouring between the two sides and trade. On the one hand, the GCC's non-energy investments in Indonesia are dispersed across numerous industries, such as Islamic finance, telecommunication, and infrastructures (M. Z. R. Rakhmat, Juan, F. T. V., Pashya, M. H., Septianie, N., & Purnama, Y, 2021). In contrast, Indonesian investments in the Gulf are primarily concentrated in the energy and infrastructure sectors.

Expanding commercial relations has also resulted in developing security and defense cooperation. The weakening importance of the United States in both regions and China's increasing aggressiveness in the South China Sea have prompted the Indonesian and Gulf governments to seek other security partners. The most recent meeting took held on March 6, 2022, when the Indonesian government met with the governments of the UAE and Saudi Arabia to discuss enhancing defense cooperation. The purpose of the meeting was to follow up on the previously agreed defense cooperation agreement. The scope of the agreement is centered on defense science and technology companies and expanding human resource capacity via the exchange of cadets and officers. Several years have passed since Indonesia, and the Gulf began cooperating on defense. After building a defense attaché office in Jakarta in 2019, the United Arab Emirates struck an agreement with three major Indonesian defense businesses, PT Pindad, PT Len Industri, and PT Dirgantara Indonesia, to produce defense equipment. Two years later, PT Pindad teamed with Caracal International UAE to create firearms and uncrewed aerial vehicles. In 2015, the

Indonesian government authorized PT Pindad to engage with Continental Aviation Service (CAS) through Transfer of Technology cooperation, licensing SS2 rifles, and marketing weapons and ammunition items to explore the Middle East.

In the meantime, the UAE, in conjunction with Rheinmetall Defense (RhD) Canada, will invest and transfer technology to Pindad to construct a remote weapon system (RWS) that may be sold locally in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. In addition, reports indicate that Qatar is interested in Indonesian military manufacture. Despite its small size, Qatar is one of the top purchasers of military products in the Middle East and maintains an interest in buying defense equipment from Indonesia.

In addition to the defense industry, Indonesia and the GCC have intensified their coordination on anti-terrorism measures, particularly with Saudi Arabia and Oman. Through these counterterrorism programs, they have sought to share their experiences and knowledge in preventing terrorism and radicalism, particularly in light of the Islamic State's expanding penetration in both nations and in rehabilitating foreign fighters returning from Syria. Several attempts to combat extremism have resulted from the programs, including the strengthening and collaboration between the national and local governments and even community institutions regarding rehabilitation, reintegration, and reeducation. In Jakarta's estimation, the Gulf states represent alternative security partners. However, the Gulf states believe that fostering defense cooperation with Indonesia would help secure their economic gains in Indonesia, contributing to their militarization strategy and replicating a partnership model that enables "little Sparta" to punch above its weight on regional and international stages.

### **Research Methodology**

This article provides a qualitative analysis of Indonesia's security perceptions in the Gulf states and Indonesian foreign policy in this region. Several issues will be discussed, including the Qatar – Gulf states war, the Gulf – Iranian rivalry, and the China-US political competition in Asia and the Middle East. In addition, this article will explain how Indonesia establishes relations with these Gulf governments in light of the region's security concerns. The data used for the analysis of this research came from books, journals, online publications, and websites. Therefore, secondary data is included in this study, as it focuses on disputes that have already been documented in reputable and well-known journals. In this regard, the data collecting approach was carefully reviewed, and only credible sources were used for the study's data collection.

## Findings & Discussion

### Indonesia and The Gulf Security

Indonesia is concerned about the Gulf's security due to the strengthening of connections. Frequently, the GCC is described as a zone of geopolitical instability ([Shayan, 2017](#)). Before the Iraq War, Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia comprised the three pillars of the regional balance. After the conflict, a new constellation of actors began redefining the regional GCC order, including state actors and transnational actors like Al-Qaeda and Jundallah. They also played a role along Iran's eastern border and other GCC regional areas. The United States was, after that present, to keep the peace. This angered member nations as well as Al-Qaeda and Jundallah, who did not want to rely on military force from non-Muslim nations and believed that the United States would obtain security control in the Gulf states. Al-terror Qaeda's acts within and beyond the Arab world are carried out with increasing ferocity and expanding power as time passes. Their actions are not unjustified but a form of opposition to US interference ([Shayan, 2017](#)).

The Iraq war also contributed to new economic, environmental, social, and military policies in the GCC region, undermining regional stability. This has led to an increase in regional arms competition. The United Arab Emirates, for instance, purchased the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system from the United States to become a regional powerhouse in the defense sector. In the economic realm, it is concerning when the Iranian government is subjected to heavy sanctions, and internal pressure threatens its legitimacy as a sovereign nation. In addition, the war between Sunni and Shia parties in the region is intensifying ([Pradhan, 2011](#)).

As the Arab Spring unfolded, security risks in the Gulf region persisted ([Al-Otaibi, 2020](#)). This incident was initiated by Tunisia, sparking a wave of revolution throughout the Arab world. It successfully organized the masses by inspiring the younger generation to demand significant political and economic reforms, such as freedom, human rights, and democratization ([Pradhan, 2011](#)). This wave of reforms has posed a danger to the traditional monarchical conservative rule on the Arabian peninsula, including the GCC region, prompting GCC member states to raise military spending from 2012 to 2016. For example, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have invested \$85 billion and \$23 billion, respectively ([Arafat, 2020](#)). Given the enormous number of Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers in Indonesia, authorities feared that similar movements could occur in Indonesia, despite the fact that the Arab Spring did not substantially impact Indonesia's relations with Gulf countries ([Gumilang, 2016](#)). At the same time, the Arab Spring had a favorable influence on Indonesia, as many GCC nations sought alternative trading partners. During and after the Arab Spring, the trade volume between Indonesia and the Gulf countries increased ([Hanifa, 2012](#)).



In the GCC, regional security problems persisted after the Arab Spring. On July 7, 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates broke diplomatic ties with Qatar amid allegations that it supported the Iranian government and was involved in funding terrorist organizations (Diaty, 2019). A blockade of air and land followed the severing of diplomatic ties with Qatar, and sea channels by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, negatively impacting Qatar's economy. The protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine, Syria, and others in the Middle East has indirectly damaged the security of the Gulf states. This was exacerbated by Qatar's economic stagnation, which negatively impacted the Gulf countries' economies and led to economic and security turmoil.

As illustrated by Leithner (2022), instability in the Gulf has affected GCC cooperation with countries outside the area. Indonesia is a country that is cautious while collaborating with Gulf states, as the Indonesian government is concerned about the Middle Eastern conflicts (M. Z. Rakhmat, & Askar, M., 2015). This is due to the growing number of Indonesians who have joined ISIS in Syria. Since the beginning of the Syrian government, the Indonesian government has developed a proactive approach to combat terrorism and deploying repressive measures against those suspected of being future terrorists. Some of them were arrested and prosecuted. Approximately 514 Indonesians have joined rebel factions in Syria, including ISIS.

Indonesia's foreign policy towards the GCC has not been severely impacted by the political upheaval in the Gulf states. Considering that China and the United States continue to control Indonesia's foreign policy. Indonesia and China engage in comprehensive collaboration in the political sphere and the economic, investment, social, and cultural spheres (M. Z. Rakhmat, & Pashya, H., 2020). The same phenomenon applies to Indonesia's long-term political, security, and economic connections with the United States.

However, three months after King Salman's visit to Indonesia in 2017, Indonesia's relations with the GCC were hampered by the June 2017 severing of diplomatic ties by five GCC member states with Qatar. The severing of diplomatic ties influenced Indonesia's regional strategy with the GCC nations. Qatar is one of Indonesia's top investors relative to other Middle Eastern countries. Between 2011 and 2016, the value of trade between Indonesia and Qatar continues to expand substantially. In 2011, the trade value between Qatar and Indonesia was \$683 million, which increased steadily until 2016, when it reached \$830 million (bbc.com., 2017).

On the one hand, severing diplomatic ties by GCC nations with Qatar was viewed as a chance for Indonesia to seek Qatari investment. On the other side, it was anticipated that severing diplomatic ties would hinder collaboration between Indonesia and the GCC nations. The rupture of diplomatic relations led to a land, sea, and air blockade that negatively

impacted the economies of Qatar and Indonesia. The Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Retno Marsudi, claimed that the blockade imposed on Qatar by five GCC member states could impede economic and tourism relations. In reaction to this circumstance, Marsudi promptly called the Saudi, Qatari, and Kuwaiti foreign ministers. Marsudi urged all sides to engage in discussion and reconciliation ([Suastha, 2017](#)). In addition, on June 15, 2017, Ma'ali Abdurrahman Muhammad al-Uwais, the special envoy of the United Arab Emirates, met with the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs to request Indonesian support in resolving the Gulf conflict ([Sheany, 2017](#)).

On October 18, 2017, in the middle of the Gulf crisis, President Jokowi received a state visit from the Emir of Qatar, highlighting Indonesia's mediation role in this conflict. Tamim bin Hamad al-state Thani's visit to Indonesia explored prospects for cooperation between Indonesia and Qatar. Additionally, Qatar was willing to engage in dialogue to settle the Gulf situation ([France24, 2017](#)). In addition, on August 28, 2019, the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs met with the Secretary-General of the GCC and signed a memorandum of understanding to establish a consultation mechanism between Indonesia and the GCC nations, which is anticipated to increase economic and security cooperation ([Anggoro, 2019](#)). This proved that the crisis did not significantly harm relations between Indonesia and the Gulf.

Similarly, the normalization of relations between some Gulf states and Israel did not affect Indonesia's position as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world and a staunch supporter of Palestinian independence in multilateral forums such as the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In a virtual press conference, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the normalization of relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain does not alter the status quo ([voi.id, 2020](#)). Nonetheless, the normalization had little effect on the relations between Indonesia and the Gulf states. Indonesia also affirms that it will continue to respect Bahrain and the UAE's decisions while recognizing Palestine as a sovereign state.

There is a likelihood of domestic pushback to Indonesia's expanding connections with the Gulf states while their relations with Israel have been repaired. Some parties, particularly conservative organizations, will see this as a support for normalization. Indonesia is experiencing a significant issue due to expanding Islamic organizations within its borders. Therefore, Indonesia will likely need to exercise caution while forming partnerships with these nations to avoid internal resistance that could lead to national political instability.

### **Indonesia and the Gulf-Iranian Tensions**

Iran has represented an existential threat to the Gulf region ([Arafat, 2020](#)). Iran's involvement has influenced the internal politics of the GCC through



military forces such as the Quds Force and Hezbollah. Iran's participation in the Gulf states' politics predates the GCC's foundation, beginning in 1979, following the revolution. Iran utilized Shia Arab organizations in the Persian Gulf to back its movement. Iran's role in the Gulf states continued until 1981 when the Islamic Front attempted a coup in Bahrain with Iran's help. Iran was also involved in the bombing of Kuwait in 1983, and according to reports, the Islamic uprising between 1994 and 1999 could not have occurred without Iran. Saudi Arabia views the Iranian menace as more difficult than the Nazi threat. Many have also highlighted that the foundation of the GCC in 1981 was in response to Iran's threat to the Gulf region, with the organization supposed to maintain regional equilibrium. Moreover, the expansion of Iran's military through its nuclear program heightens tensions between the Persian Gulf and Iran. The GCC nations have increased their military spending in response. In addition, the GCC actively seeks support from the United States ([Arafat, 2020](#)).

The friction between Iran and the GCC has not harmed the partnership between Indonesia and the GCC. Indonesia strives to retain a minimum role in Middle Eastern politics under its goal of free and active foreign relations. Following this approach, Indonesia prioritizes home challenges and developments while actively promoting world peace. Indonesia is a member of the United Nations' International Peacekeeping Force. Diplomacy and peace are the top priorities of Indonesia's foreign policy. Indonesia has developed positive connections with Iran, the GCC, and the United States and has no desire to jeopardize them. In 2006, the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and several other nations slapped sanctions on Iran in response to its nuclear program. Indonesia elected to abstain from voting on resolution 1803 at the UN Security Council in 2008, despite supporting resolution 1747 to impose sanctions on Iran in 2007. ([Gindarsah, 2012](#)). Indonesia had joined in indirect measures to reduce tensions between Iran and the Gulf monarchies, as seen by the agreement between Indonesia and the European Union to reduce tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran ([Post, 2016](#)). Indonesia, however, maintains impartiality by keeping relations with both parties.

As underlined by [Mouritzen and Wivel \(2022\)](#), this was clear when President Jokowi sent the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs to Iran and Saudi Arabia in January 2016. The purpose of this trip was to underscore Indonesia's neutrality in this crisis ([A. P. Sari, 2016](#)). The Indonesian foreign minister also delivered a message of peace from President Jokowi to President Hassan Rouhani of Iran and King Salman of Saudi Arabia ([Tempo.co., 2016](#)). As the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has a crucial role in resolving tensions between Iran and the Gulf monarchies, according to the letter. During a January 2016 meeting with Jokowi, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) urged the Indonesian government to mediate the issue. The Minister of Religion of Indonesia also met with Jokowi to convey Indonesia's intention to convene an international meeting between Iran and Saudi Arabia ([Kwok,](#)

2016). Indonesia's actions to maintain neutrality in response to the tensions enable Indonesia to maintain its connections with Iran.

Indonesia has a general interest in Iran, particularly in its energy industry. In December 2016, during Jokowi's state visit to Iran, Indonesia agreed to acquire 500,000 metric tons of LPG from Iran in 2017. (Parlina, 2016).

Indonesia is also interested in the Gulf states for commerce, investment, and energy cooperation. Since the escalation of tensions between Iran and the Gulf states following the 2017 Gulf crisis, the volume of commerce between Indonesia and the GCC states has surged by 40 percent, from \$8.68 million in 2016 to \$12.15 billion in 2018. There was also a 26 percent increase in the investment sector between 2016 and 2018, from US\$60,3 million to US\$76.1 million (M. Z. R. Rakhmat, Juan, F. T. V., Pashya, M. H., Septianie, N., & Purnama, Y, 2021). In addition, Indonesia sends many pilgrims and domestic workers to Gulf countries each year. To safeguard the safety of its citizens in the GCC, Indonesia must maintain strong connections with the area.

Due to the tension between Iran and the Gulf states, the Gulf states, especially Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, have rushed to sever diplomatic ties with Iran (L. A. T. Sari, Nabila, & Adi, 2020). The conflict, however, appears to have little effect on Indonesia. As a result, Indonesia has been encouraged to assume the role of a mediator through developing international collaboration, particularly with OIC nations, as a strategy to enhance Islamic unity, worldwide security, and international peace. However, Indonesia just summoned both parties to urge them to de-escalate the situation. In addition, Indonesia had no other coercive tools to respond to this conflict.

Indonesia's foreign policy does not prioritize intervention in international conflicts. When addressing foreign challenges, the nation is primarily motivated by domestic concerns. This is evident in Jokowi's foreign forum speeches. They rely primarily on rhetoric to attract foreign investment and avoid taking a stance on matters such as the South China Sea crisis or the repression of the Rohingya in Myanmar. Indonesia has established positive relationships with the GCC and Iran and has no desire to jeopardize them. However, tensions between Iran and the GCC affect Indonesia's oil price. Nearly 49 percent of Indonesia's oil supply originates from Gulf nations, particularly Saudi Arabia. Thus, when regional tensions arise, Indonesia will be affected. In 2020, when Iran launched its ballistic missile attack, oil prices increased by 1.4% to US\$ 69.21 per barrel (Utama, 2020). When the price of oil increases, Indonesia's annual budget must be revised. As the US dollar is utilized in oil transactions, this also impacts the exchange rate of the Indonesian currency. Although Indonesia is not actively participating in the conflict, it anticipates the impact on its macroeconomy. With minimal intervention, Indonesia believes it is on the correct track to bolster regional stability and a peaceful approach to the crisis.

### **Indonesia, the Gulf, and the US**

It is impossible to isolate the dynamics of Indonesia-Gulf relations from their shared links with the United States. The relationship between Indonesia and the United States has fluctuated throughout the past 71 years. During the Soeharto regime, the United States was one of Indonesia's most important economic and defense partners. As a result of Indonesia's involvement in human rights violations in East Timor and the May 1998 riots, which led to the resignation of President Soeharto, the alliance became strained. Due to these events, the US imposed a ten-year arms embargo on Indonesia from 1995 to 2005. The Indonesian military was distressed as the US supplied the vast bulk of spare parts for combat equipment used by the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI). Relations between Jakarta and Washington, DC improved under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's administration (2004-2014). The arms embargo against Indonesia was eventually abolished at that time, and economic relations flourished. In 2010, Indonesia and the United States also inked a Comprehensive Partnership embracing other sectors than economics. Under the leadership of Obama and Jokowi, the agreement was strengthened in 2015 to oppose China's expansion in the South China Sea region, which is vital for the security and economy of the Asian region ([House., 2015](#)).

Nonetheless, with the election of Jokowi, ties between the two countries became strained. Even during the pandemic, Jokowi had been welcomed to the White House for four years and vice versa. America's influence in Indonesia is negligible, despite Indonesia's stance being vital to Washington's efforts to balance China ([Djalal, 2021](#)). China, on the other hand, which is America's principal competitor, has emerged as Indonesia's primary partner. In addition to the Belt and Road Initiatives, close economic ties between persons around Jokowi and their Chinese counterparts are a crucial component. Eventually, China became Indonesia's major trading partner and second-largest investor. Beijing is also the driving force behind the management of Covid 19 in Indonesia, as indicated by the widespread adoption of the Sinovac vaccine.

This was also a consideration for Donald Trump, who neglected Indonesia during his tenure in government. On one occasion, he claimed that 16 nations, including Indonesia, were fraudulent, resulting in a decline in trade between Jakarta and Washington, DC. Despite these developments, Indonesia continues to retain ties with the United States. Despite ten years of stagnant trade, Indonesia's exports to the United States reached \$14 billion in 2020 or 12.68 percent of Indonesia's total exports. With a ratio approaching 20 percent, the United States is second only to China as Indonesia's primary export destination ([Rosendar, 2020](#)). Under Biden, the shift in the direction of American foreign policy has been a breath of fresh air for strengthening relations between Indonesia and the United States.

In addition, Indonesia's defense cooperation with the United States is fairly robust; from 1998 to 2016, Indonesia and the United States conducted 33

Joint Exercises, nine Exchanges of Visits, and fourteen Port Calls. Indonesia has submitted a request for the purchase of fighter planes, helicopters, missiles, spare parts, etc. for approximately US\$1.8 billion, which is divided into several phases: in 2012, it was estimated at US\$1.2 billion, and in 2013 it was estimated at US\$500 million, in 2015 it was estimated at US\$47 million, and in 2016 it was estimated at US\$32 million ([Affairs., 2021](#)).

Trump pressured Indonesia during his presidency by threatening to enforce CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) if Indonesia purchased weapons from Russia. Indonesia spent \$2 billion in 2020 to purchase fighter aircraft, missiles, and other spare parts from the United States. This is done to support the defense ministry's modernization plan and Jokowi's a pledge to enhance the military budget by 1.5 percent of Indonesia's GDP within five years. Given the terrible condition of the Indonesian Navy and coast guard units, this is a reasonable action. According to research published by the Council on Foreign Relations, Indonesia lags behind other Southeast Asian nations, such as Vietnam, in terms of military equipment and integration. Given Indonesia's substantial interests in defending its territory in the South China Sea, this is a concerning development ([Kurlantzick, 2018](#)). The United States must strengthen Indonesia's security to protect Asia, particularly the South China Sea, from Chinese control.

Indonesia and the United States are currently dealing with the same problem: blocking China's expansion in the South China Sea. The United States invited Indonesia's defense minister to collaborate with China by the end of 2020. Since 2000, Prabowo has been prohibited from visiting the United States because he was believed to have been involved in cases of serious human rights violations. After eliminating the prohibition, Prabowo publicly declared that the United States was an important nation for Indonesia at the time ([Phil Stewart, 2020](#)). This indicates that the two countries would enhance their ties, especially since Biden intends to take a tougher stance against China in Southeast Asia.

Nonetheless, Indonesia faces a problem. Indonesia has strong links with China on the one hand. Considering that China is Indonesia's largest commercial partner and second-largest investor, several observers feel Indonesia needs China for its national economic recovery. In contrast, the United States is a major actor capable of securing the South China Sea. Consequently, the Indonesian government will probably maintain cautious relations with Beijing and Washington, DC. The Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Retno Marsudi, echoed this sentiment, stating, "Indonesia would remain impartial by avoiding the competition between the United States and China" ([Allard & Widiyanto, 2020](#)).

This effect on Indonesia's connections with Gulf nations is evident. Undoubtedly, the United States and China compete in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. In this instance, Jakarta will communicate with the Gulf states with caution. The Indonesian attitude toward Iran during the

administration of Ahmadinejad is one example. The Iranian leadership requested Jakarta's cooperation but was denied because the Indonesian capital feared straining its relations with the United States. As a result of its policy of free and active international relations, Indonesia is likely to maintain a low profile in Middle Eastern politics. Under this approach, Indonesia prioritizes home concerns while fostering international peace. In addition, Indonesia is a member of the International Peacekeeping Force. Diplomacy and peace are the top priorities of Indonesia's foreign policy. Indonesia's response to Israel's occupation of the West Bank is one example. Instead of deploying armed forces, Indonesia has shown solidarity with the Muslim world by adopting a draft resolution denouncing Israel's occupation of the West Bank.

Considering the preceding examples, Indonesia will likely avoid a power struggle in the Gulf region. As indicated previously, the nation frequently handles international or extra-regional concerns when national issues urge it to do so. This is evident in Jokowi's foreign forum speeches. They rely primarily on rhetoric to attract foreign investment and avoid taking a stance on matters such as the South China Sea crisis or the repression of the Rohingya in Myanmar. It will continue demonstrating neutrality in its relations with the GCC nations. Indonesia has built positive connections with the GCC, China, and the United States, which it does not desire to jeopardize.

Likewise, as tensions between the United States and China escalate, Indonesia will likely reconsider its relations with the two giants. Expanding partnerships with non-traditional allies, such as the Gulf states, will likely reduce its dependence on the two nations. In addition to natural resources and attractive business prospects, Indonesia views the region as a gateway to unexplored consumer markets for its products. The Gulf might serve as a center for Middle Eastern economic progress. In addition, increasing ties with these nations would not be motivated by ideology or sentiment. They share several political views with Indonesia, including comparable Islamic backgrounds with Gulf states and political stances on matters like the Syrian war and Afghanistan. This could also aid Jakarta's efforts to maintain domestic stability. Its relations with the Gulf are not seen negatively by Indonesians, as is the case with Indonesia's relations with China and the United States.

## **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that as the relationship between Indonesia and the Gulf states has grown, security and stability in the Gulf have become an increasingly significant factor in Indonesia's foreign policy calculations. Examining several significant security issues in the Gulf, such as the Arab Spring, the 2017 Gulf crisis, and the Gulf-Iranian dispute, as well as the roles of the United States in the region, the paper concludes that these diverse security concerns have minimal impact on the continuation of the relationship between Indonesia and the Gulf.

Indonesia has frequently been a potential replacement whenever the region faces upheaval. Given the expanding interests of both parties in strengthening ties and the ongoing instability of the Gulf and broader Middle East area, they are compelled to share a desire for peace, security, and stability in the region. In this context, Indonesia and the Gulf are identifying mechanisms that would foster economic and political cooperation and provide an alternative and comprehensive security architecture for the Gulf. As Indonesia-GCC relations are politically complex and delicate, enhancing defense and security relationships is relevant. In addition to its engagement with the GCC, Indonesia enjoys extensive relationships with Iran.

### **Implications**

Indonesia could embrace a joint approach to safeguard Gulf security if Iran-GCC tensions persist. Such actions could improve the stability of the Gulf region for Indonesia, which could then preserve its interests in the region while acting as a mediator to reduce regional tensions by establishing a security framework. Indonesia and the Gulf states could seek a cooperative security arrangement in this framework. Indonesia is a significant member of several existing structures, like the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, which the Gulf states may join. Countries such as Oman and the UAE have participated in these institutional arrangements, and other GCC nations should do the same. Additionally, the GCC can strengthen its engagement with the ASEAN Regional Forum, which has been partially effective in "fostering constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern; and to make significant contributions to efforts toward confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region."

Strengthening multilateralism, a more coordinated interaction between states, is another path that can boost efficiency and build better-coordinated international networks. Indonesia and GCC nations have made efforts in this regard through several organizations, such as the G20 — an international meeting for the governments and central bank governors of 19 countries, as well as the European Union and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The GCC supported and welcomed Indonesia's presidency of the G20. It has also backed Saudi Arabia's attempts to persuade important G20 members to debate global challenges and possibilities. By collaborating more standardized manner, both parties might overcome the constraints impeding the advancement of their relationships and address the numerous regional and global issues they hope to address through their collaboration.



## Limitations

This study's findings are limited due to its reliance on secondary sources and its failure to elaborate on the impact of the security situation in the Gulf on Indonesia's relations with regional nations. This could be a potential route for future research to expand the data sources to include primary data. Moreover, given the relationship between Indonesia and the Gulf countries is anticipated to increase and the security situation in the Gulf will continue to vary, it would be beneficial to continue documenting and analyzing the future impact of the latter on the former, or vice versa.

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