

## **Indonesia in “the Multiverse of Madness”**

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Well, not exactly similar to Doctor Strange’s saga in parallel universes, but arguably Indonesia and international community is currently experiencing multi-challenges in the “universes” of geopolitics, geostrategic, geo-economics, digital and tech rivalries, pandemic, as well as climate change and its dire environmental impacts. Let’s look at the exhibits.

### **Exhibit one: Unipolarity**

Current global security architecture is fundamentally a unipolar world where the United States sit at the top with the highest military spending in the world of over USD 870 billion, and Security Treaty with over 50 countries across the world from South America to the Middle East, and Western Europe to East Asia and Western Pacific. These treaties mean that the US has military presence from many corners of the continents and is able to deploy its massive military capabilities everywhere in the world in probably less than 24 hours.

This unipolarity has created substantial major obstacle in the UN Security Council (UNSC) to achieve resolution for peace making and even peace maintaining. In addition, the composition of the Permanent Members of the UNSC which is basically designed from the winners of the Second World War is incompatible with the current global security threats. However reforming UNSC is so difficult that all discussions on this seem to be just lip service. It would be against the interests of all Permanent Members of UNSC to allow new Permanent Members because each of them has separate but common interests. US will want to maintain global security superiority, Russia’s limited budget defense and increasing constraints in developing new war machines will not want to release its veto power, China with its rising power will certainly be reluctant to share the UNSC power with new comers, especially its neighboring countries, and for UK and France that were once the global superpower for hundreds of years are not likely to relinquish their influence at global level by allowing other European to be Permanent Member of UNSC. For all of them, allowing new members in Permanent Seat could be regarded as strategic mistakes.

Thus, in conflicts where they are directly or indirectly involved, the acclamation of resolution of UNSC would be impossible. The world has witnessed this failure in the ongoing conflict of Ukraine and Palestine.

### **Exhibit two: Multipolarity**

Geo-economics dimension reveal different reality. It is an overlapping multipolar world and it is not dominated by the US. There are center of economic growths from different parts of the world that are separated by distance and regulatory environment, but are interlinked. ASEAN, RCEP, NAFTA, Mercosur, African Economic Community, and EU are all specific to their own regions with their own governance and specific types of trade and services. However, they are linked to each other through global trade and intra-regional treaties.

In addition, the three largest economies the world, the US with USD 25 trillion, EU with USD 19 trillion and China with USD 17 trillion are all interlinked regardless of ideology, political system and military power. Unlike the relations of superpowers in the Cold War that where

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<sup>1</sup> Harvard Law 1992.

there were no economic ties and linkages, the three global economic powers are trading and investing with one another deeply and widely. US and China goods and services trade are about USD 758 billion, EU and China trade is USD 783 billion, and EU and US trade amounts to USD 848 billion. The total value of these trade among the three largest economies in the world is almost twice as Russia GDP, or almost the same as the GDP of all countries in Southeast Asia.

Thus, to really have a serious containment policy as in the Cold War is simply impossible. And, also the discussion of having alternative world order would seem to contradict the real number of trade interest groups in those three countries. The conversation in EU in general or in the strongest economy in the EU, Germany, is not about containment or decoupling, but more of de-risking and diversification.

This fact will also make Western media and officials queries on why countries in Southeast Asia or Indonesia specifically have strong trade relations with China is problematically hypocritical when the West's trade with China is similar to the whole Southeast Asian economies, if not larger.

### **Exhibit three: non-state actors more powerful than nations**

In the language of international relations and international laws, non-state actors are normally referred to pirates, armed robbers at sea, terrorist, drug smugglers. However, there are now non-state actors that have much more power than nations, even the US. They are the big techs, such as Apple, Meta, Amazon and Alphabet. Prof. Galloway of New York University have argued that big techs are problematic in four areas namely removing jobs, putting profits over national securities, democracies and private data protection, tax evasion, and monopoly.

This situation is worsened by the arrival of Artificial Intelligence (AI) that while it is great for societies on one hand but on the other hand can be dangerous as well. Jack Clark of Anthropic stated in UNSC last summer that AI's character is both multipurpose and difficult to predict. AI can be useful in our understanding of human biology, but can also make biological weapon.

The three major economies have three separates approaches to AI that may not be linked to the unipolarity of global security architecture, although AI will definitely impact global security landscape. The US has market-driven policy that is imbedded in rather voluntary nature of The Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights, the EU has General Data Protection Regulation, Digital Market Acts, Digital Services Acts, and now EU AI Act that underscore the importance of personal data protection, and China has state-driven regulatory environment.

The world now sees three major regulatory preferences that may or may not be easy to be fused into a global legal order, and also big tech that has its powers continue to be difficult to be regulated under state sovereignty, either in democracies or otherwise.

### **Agile Foreign Policy**

Indonesia is probably one of few countries, or even the only one, that has foreign policy principle written in its Constitution: "Whereas Independence is truly the right of all nations and therefore colonization in the world shall be abolished, as it is not in accordance with humanity and justice" and "to participate in the execution of world order which is by virtue of freedom, perpetual peace and social justice". These are the basis of Indonesian principle of foreign policy, i.e independent and active foreign policy.

Mohammad Hatta wrote in details about what exactly is independent and active foreign policy in his article in Foreign Affairs journal on 1 April 1953 aptly entitled “Indonesia’s Foreign Policy”. His piece is a must for those, foreign and domestic, who need to understand Indonesian foreign policy. Independent attitude is not neutrality. It is an attitude that does not permanently take side to either warring powers and does not pledge itself permanently to keep aloof or to remain neutral to any incidents that may arise out of controversy between powers. Thus, when a problem or incident arise, Indonesia will base its attitude on independence action taking into consideration its own conception based on UN Charter, and its own national interests, such as Indonesia’s own independence, sovereignty and territory. And by “active” is meant the effort to work energetically for the preservation of peace and relaxation of tensions between powers.

While Hatta’s article referred to Blocs in the Cold War, this independent and active foreign policy is still relevant today, and many countries, even in the EU, are looking to define a similar manner of independent and active foreign policy that is called “strategic independence”.

This principle has been the driving force in numerous landmark decisions of Indonesian foreign policy such as the establishment of Non-Aligned Movement, sending of Indonesia’s first UN Peace Keeping soldiers in 1956, creation of Asean in 1967, fight for the recognition of Indonesia as an archipelagic state, launching of Jakarta Informal Meeting in 1988 that eventually ended the Indochina Conflict and also the mediation role to end conflict between the Philippines and MNLF. It is this principle that has also contributed to the peace and stability in Southeast Asia.

This principle, along with other natural assets such as largest archipelagic waters in the world located in one of the most strategic sea lanes of communications that are vital to US, China, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, South Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe, and also largest size of economy in Southeast Asia, young population of 280 million people as well as the largest Moslem country on Earth, should be able to be translated into “convening power” and “influence”. Indeed, as strength and power alone are not a guarantee to have influence.

Indonesia should be able to influence global debate on strategic raw materials, by creating strategic raw material producing countries, on regional and global rules about AI, on relaxing the strategic competition between US and China in Asia by concrete measures, such as trilaterally working together on environment and climate change in Indonesia or other regions with countries vulnerable to rising sea-level or developing regional coast guard cooperation using the US-China Coast Guard MOU, to lead developing countries in climate finance by providing examples or networks.

On peace-making, Indonesia should not only insist major players in different conflicts to refrain themselves as Mohamad Hatta famously stated that “foreign policy is not determined just by hopes and desires, nor by the likes and dislikes of statesmen and national leaders.”, but also actively proposes solutions. Whether or not any Indonesian proposals are accepted, Indonesia is bound by its Constitution to actively seek peace-making and not just becoming foreign policy bystander. After all, Indonesia has both the experience of being facilitator and mediator in regional conflicts, as well as, being mediated by foreign partners in its own domestic conflict in Aceh.

An agile foreign policy is what Indonesia had in the past and what it needs in the near and long future in a world full of simmering conflicts in Southeast Asian region, the Middle East and beyond, as well as threats of environmental degradation from climate change and the rising power of individuals on useful but problematic technologies.