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## **Southeast Asia to Indo-Pacific: How Far Indonesian Geostrategic Doctrine Shapes It's Position**

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### ***Abstract***

*Geographically, Indonesia is one of country that has so many potentials. With its location between two continents and oceans, Indonesia could make strategic role in region and the world. Geostrategy of one country play an important role to its foreign policy and diplomacy. Indonesia has 'national resilience' as the national geostrategic doctrine. It will be interesting to study how far that geostrategic doctrine influences international relations of Indonesia. This study will discuss in several parts, from the role of Indonesia as a part of middle-power countries in different government administration to the position of Indonesia in the region because of its geostrategic doctrine.*

**Keywords:** *geostrategic doctrine, national resilience, middle power countries, Southeast Asia, Indo-Pacific, Indonesia*

### **Abstrak**

Secara geografis, Indonesia adalah salah satu negara yang memiliki banyak potensi. Dengan letaknya yang ada di antara dua benua dan samudera, Indonesia dapat memiliki peran strategis di kawasan dan dunia. Geostrategi dari suatu negara memainkan peranan yang penting terhadap kebijakan luar negeri dan diplomasi. Indonesia memiliki 'ketahanan nasional' sebagai doktrin geostrategi nasional. Akan menarik untuk mengkaji sejauh mana doktrin geostrategi mempengaruhi hubungan internasional Indonesia. Studi ini akan dibagi menjadi beberapa bagian, mulai dari peranan Indonesia sebagai bagian dari negara kekuatan menengah dalam pemerintahan yang berbeda hingga posisi Indonesia di kawasan akibat dari doktrin geostrategi tersebut.

**Kata kunci:** doktrin geostrategi, ketahanan nasional, negara kekuatan menengah, Asia Tenggara, Indo-Pasifik, Indonesia

## **Introduction**

Indonesia is one of the countries reside in Southeast Asia that has so many potentials in its geographic position. It is located between two continents, Asia –the largest one– and Australia, and between the first and third largest oceans in the world: Indian and Pacific. These cross positions make Indonesia becoming very strategic not only in the region but also in the world. Not to mention the other potential such as natural resources and the number of populations.

Since President Soekarno's era or Old Order, Indonesia had great attention to its geographic condition. In the speech of inauguration of National Defense Institute (since 1994 became National Resilience Institute), President Soekarno said that Indonesia need to pay attention to their geopolitics. He said, "*...A national defense is really strong if it stands on the characteristics of one's own nation, the Motherland itself. And knowledge about the nation itself, the Motherland itself, is discussed which is called geopolitics. ...national defense can only be maximized, if we base the national defense on geopolitical knowledge*" (Soekarno, 1965)." While Suradinata and Dinuth (2001) mentioned that the speech as

*political strategical guidance*, they inferred it was not mentioning about geostrategy concept.

It was National Resilience Institute (*Lembaga Ketahanan Nasional, Lemhannas*) whose formulate Indonesia's geostrategy as national resilience. In 1968 and 1979, Lemhannas concepted that national resilience was tenacity and resilience. In addition to that, in 1972 they concepted national resilience as a dynamic condition consist of tenacity and toughness based on *Asta Gatra* (or the Eight Aspects: geography, demography, natural resources, ideology, politics, economy, socio-cultural, defense and security).

Governor of Lemhannas said that the national resilience of Indonesia is defensive, less militaristic, and inward-looking in nature (Lemhannas RI, 2010). That was the opposite of the general understanding of geostrategy characterized with the role of military, the aggressive nature in offensive, and outward-looking. But later in their falsification test to the national resilience as Indonesian geostrategic doctrine, Priyono, Herman, & Yusgiantoro (2017) had two conclusions the applicability of geostrategy: formulation of national objective and consideration of geography and

geopolitical conditions. On the other hand, there are five evidences indicating inapplicability of geostrategy: (1) does not provide coordination on (military) strategy; (2) does not show planning strategies, political/diplomacy efforts, or military efforts; (3) not actively influencing regional politics-strategy; (4) changes occur over a long period of time; and (5) defensiveness prioritizes attitudes of consultation and cooperation.

From all conditions mentioned above, this article want to explore how far Indonesian geostrategic doctrine influencing its international relations. First, the author wants to discuss about Indonesia's position between the other countries in the world. Second, the author will discuss Indonesia's position in regional: Southeast Asia and Indo-Pacific. This article will close with a brief conclusion about all the topics discussed.

### **Indonesia as a Part of Middle Power Countries**

#### *Defining middle powers and their roles*

Before stepping further, the author wants to give a brief explanation of 'middle power'. Then, we will look at how Indonesia and its role as a middle power country. What exactly 'middle power' is?

Jordaan (2003) define middle power as a country, "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". While Chapnick (1999) saw this term could be distinct in three models: functional, behavioral, and hierarchical.

A country has middle power, in the functional model, when it can influence certain areas and function in international affairs. In the behavioral model, a country considered as middle power when it has done actions or roles seen as middle power or that country identifies itself as a middle power. As mentioned by Cooper, Higgott, & Nossal (1993), when a country tends to pursue a multilateral approach to international problems, embracing compromise position when there are international disputes, and try to be 'a good international citizen' in their diplomacy, then it considered as a middle power. The hierarchical model seeks a country based on its international standing which related to the capabilities. Earlier work from Holbraad (1984) saw middle power based on countries' Gross National Product (GNP) and population size. While Kim (2009) noted the size of the territory, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the volume of

trade and foreign currency reserves, population, and the number of soldiers as indicators of a middle power in the hierarchical model.

Those views and definitions about middle power got criticism from Karim (2018) who said: “to rely heavily on traditional Western middle powers as a source of its theorizing”. He argued middle power literature can enhance by using a role theory approach. Middle power behavior is driven by role conceptions enacted by policymakers in a country to give a more significant role in the international order. Role conceptions could be an in-between

**Table 1** shows the classification mentioned before.

link for middle powers’ status-seeking behavior and their foreign policy agenda.

Hidayatullah (2017) classifying middle powers based on regional and multilateral roles. He selected eleven countries that represent all possible middle powers in the world today: Canada, Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Mexico, India, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia. Those countries are members of BRICS, MIKTA, and participation in Group of Twenty (G20). He differentiated those countries into realists, neo-liberalist, and constructivist to find their variables and indicators.

**Table 1. Middle Power Role based on Their Resources**

Approach (Resources)	Regional or Multilateral Role	Nature of Relation to other Countries in Its Region
Realism (Hard power)	Enforcer (e.g. China and Russia)	Fear, able to enforce policy, lack of trust, smaller power-dependent on middle power
Neo-liberalism (Diplomatic behavior)	Assembler (e.g. Brazil, India, Mexico, South Africa, and Turkey)	Trust, long-term mutual consultation, institutionalized cooperation, non-veto, lack of force, non-interference
Constructivism (Soft power)	Advocator (e.g. Australia, Canada, and South Korea)	The issue-based coalition, ad hoc, beyond regional diplomacy, short term influence, need to be frequently renewed through agreements and protocols

*Source: Hidayatullah (2017)*

*Indonesia's roles as a middle power*

Hidayatullah (2017) later discussed Indonesia's role in international affairs based on classification as mentioned in

**Table 1.** He explained briefly based on Indonesia's history from the Old Order Era until the Reformation Era. Indonesia played a role as an Assembler on periods, from Old Order to New Order Era. In Old Order under Soekarno served as President, Indonesia pioneered Asian-African Conference or Bandung Conference on 18-24 April 1955. That conference was the foundation of the Non-Aligned Movement, as mentioned in the sixth principle from Ten Principles of Bandung, "Abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defense to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers" (Keethaponcalan, 2016).

During President Soeharto's Era in New Order, Indonesia and the other four countries in Southeast Asia established the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on 8 October 1967. By using ASEAN, Indonesia play a more pivotal role as Assembler in the Southeast Asia region concerning long-term regional economic and social cooperation. The expansion of membership into all countries in the region and application of the non-interference

principle on ASEAN are some proves that Indonesia had success in a contemporary leadership role in ASEAN (Putra, 2015).

Early time in Reformation Era, started in the administration of President Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie until President Megawati Soekarnoputri, Indonesia has a great shifting in domestic affairs. This impacted in ASEAN as the result of a vacuum in Indonesia's leadership and later impacted the performance of ASEAN itself. But in another hand, what has been done in Indonesia's domestic affairs, which is reforming to become a more democratic and tolerance –which is 'promoted' in President Abdurrahman Wahid's administration– would enable this nation to act as Advocator role in President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's administration (Hidayatullah, 2017).

In President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's administration, Indonesia played a role as Assembler and Advocator. Indonesia's "Dynamic Equilibrium" coined by Natalegawa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Yudhoyono's second term administration (2009-2014), has a purpose

to build, "...a series of regional mechanisms, driven by middle powers, in which none are dominant, and none excluded.... The centerpieces of that system are the expanded ASEAN institutions, including the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) as well as the web of burgeoning bilateral and trilateral relationships around the region" (Poling, 2013) (Yaday, 2020). As a part of the Assembler role, Indonesia also participated in East Asia Summit (EAS) for the first time on 14 December 2005 at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In EAS, Indonesia drives partnership between two regions: Southeast Asia and East Asia (Hidayatullah, 2017).

Later, on the sideline of the G20's Foreign Ministers Meeting in 2012 in Los Cabos, Mexico, Indonesia joined informal partnership with Mexico, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia called MIKTA (Jongryn, 2015). In the next year's meeting

in September 2013, they lunch this partnership in New York at a meeting held on the sidelines of Leaders' Week of the UN General Assembly. MIKTA aims to support effective global governance. Jongryn (2015) proposed that there are three potential stages for this partnership: international economic cooperation, economic-security linkages, and traditional security cooperation.

Santikajaya (2017) has another view regarding Indonesia's role in foreign affairs. As one of the emerging powers, Indonesia has a different role than the four major emerging powers, Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC), or the other middle powers, such as Canada, Australia, and Japan. While he agreed with Acharya's (2015) argument that there are three factors of Indonesia successfully build and balance very well, Santikajaya proposed three parameters to distinguish Indonesia from BRIC countries and middle powers: attitude toward international order, promoted role, and nexus between regional and global role. The different behavior between BRIC, Indonesia, and middle powers explained briefly in

**Table 2.**

**Table 2. Behaviors of BRIC, Indonesia, and Middle Powers**

Parameters		
Attitude toward global order	Performed role	Nexus between regional and global roles

BRIC	Revisionist	Great power-status seeking	Weak regional orientation due to their priority to pursue either domination ambition or detached role
Indonesia	Soft revisionist	Normative bridge-builder	Balanced role through accommodative regional leadership
Middle powers	Status quo	Mediator with legitimator tendency	Weak regional orientation due to their integration to the current international order

Source: Santikajaya (2017)

### **Indonesia Position in the Region**

#### *Southeast Asia*

In Southeast Asia, Indonesia determines its position as a dominant player. As mentioned by Hidayatullah (2017), Indonesia regain its position since the establishment of ASEAN in 1967. Indonesia not only as one of ASEAN's founders but also its de facto leader or *primus inter pares* because of Indonesia's active contribution as ASEAN's norm entrepreneur and agenda-setter (Heiduk, 2016). But then Indonesia had changed its attention when hampered by the Asia financial crisis in 1997-1998. In the early period of Reformation Era, Indonesia under three administrations –President Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, President Abdurrahman Wahid, and Presiden Megawati Soekarnoputri– as mentioned above, looked more had domestic focus rather than maintaining its regional leadership in ASEAN (Heiduk, 2016).

From 1999-2003, Indonesia gave more weight on its internal affairs to did democratic transformation in the political system.

Heiduk (2016) has several notes regarding Indonesia's regional leadership in ASEAN. He mentioned that related to the ASEAN Community which consists of three pillars: ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASSC). Terrorism, intra-state conflicts, and pandemics were some of the tests for APSC from the internal side. These are challenges for APSC in general. As a leader in the Southeast Asia region, Indonesia also 'hit' by Jemaah Islamiyah's terrorism. In the results, Indonesia appeared unstable, weak and threatened by disintegration. While dealing with conflicts and crises in the region, APSC viewed lack of new initiatives or approaches. It is giving too



much focus on conflict prevention rather than conflict management and conflict resolution.

In the second pillar, AEC, two things seem important to notice: ASEAN Single Aviation Market (ASAM) and Labor Mobility. The first one intended to provide new markets and flight routes of airlines in Southeast Asia. In practice, ASEAN members seemed reluctant to implement ASAM, instead, they tend to do it bilaterally. Indonesia, on the other hand, gives resistance to this kind of cooperation. They assumed liberalization ideas on the aviation market could give an ineffective impact on Indonesia airlines on domestic routes and markets. Lacking the capacity of some big airports in Indonesia, namely Soekarno-Hatta in Jakarta, Juanda in Surabaya, and Ngurah Rai in Denpasar is the other reason why Indonesia delayed the implementation of ASAM.

Indonesia's concern on labor mobility, as one of mentioned by Heiduk (2016) regarding AEC, seemed in a conservative position. Together with the Philippines, they are members of ASEAN that face some problems in this field. They had high birth rates, high unemployment levels, and

the surplus of labor. Indonesia threatened by the possibility of trapped in middle-income status (Suryadarma, 2013). Back in 2013, Indonesia seemed not ready for labor mobility among ASEAN's member countries proved by several constraints and limitations at the regional level. It was confirmed in Article 26 in Regulation of Ministry of Manpower No. 12/2013<sup>1</sup>, foreign workers must provide proof of no less than five years of work experience, be able to speak Bahasa Indonesia, and be able to transfer their skill set and knowledge to an Indonesian worker during their stay as part of a traineeship.

But in the latest development, Indonesia seems to seek to facilitate not only about labor mobility but also regarding let foreign workers to work in Indonesia. Decree of the Minister of Manpower No. 228/2019 to give relaxation in about nineteen categories of positions that can be occupied by foreign workers. It was looked like the need of Indonesia on direct foreign investment impacting on the fulfillment of broader positions for foreign workers. Based on data from the Ministry of Manpower on December 31, 2017, from 85,974 foreign workers, 28.85% or 24,804

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<sup>1</sup> This regulation amended several times. The latest one is Regulation of Ministry Manpower No. 10/2018. In this regulation, foreign workers have no

need ability to speak Bahasa Indonesia. This should made foreign worker easier in one want to work in Indonesia.

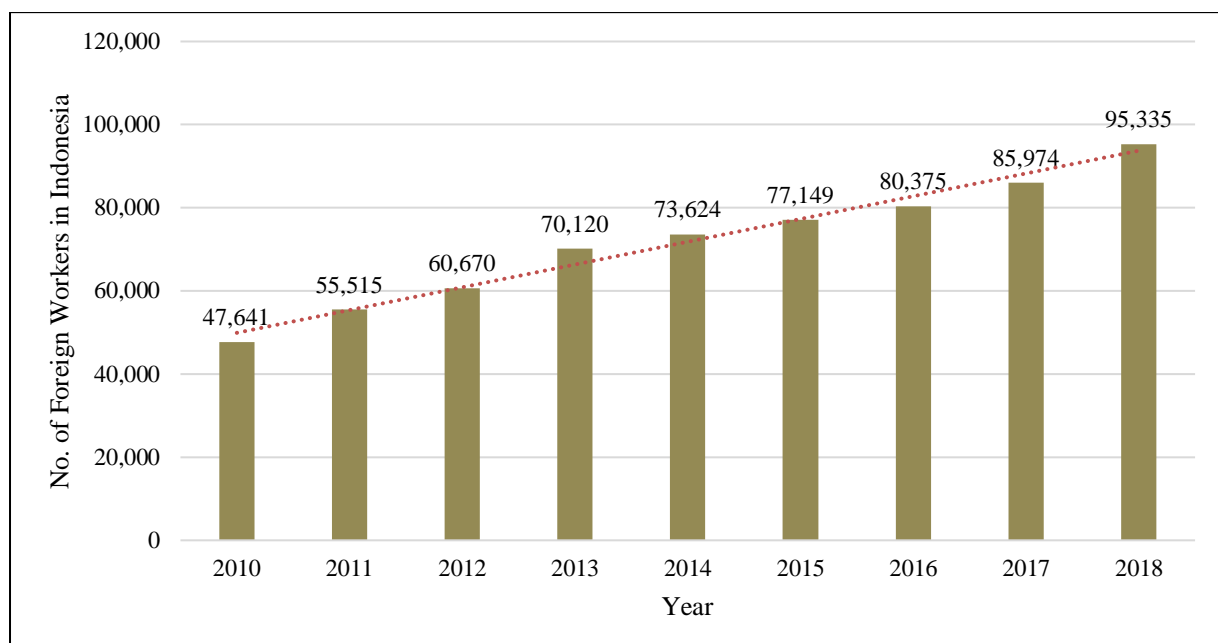


are coming from China (Databoks, 2018). Indonesia has a trend in the rise of foreign workers as mentioned in **Error! Reference source not found.**

Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand are ASEAN members who set a regional agenda in labor mobility. Heiduk (2016) mentioned that there are several factors

why they became the agenda setter. The prevalence of industrialized and highly dynamic national economies with large service sectors as one factor. The other factors are related to the low number of birth rates and highly needed in highly qualified and specialized workers in several sectors of the economy.

**Figure 1. Number of Foreign Workers in Indonesia**



Source: Databoks (2018)

The last pillar of the ASEAN Community is the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). In discussing this issue, Heiduk mentioned that there are two things seem important to notice. The first one is regarding disaster management. Disaster management gains regional attention since 1971, heavily because of geographic conditions in Southeast Asia. But it is tsunami hampered Province of

Aceh on December 26, 2004, that gave Indonesia and several ASEAN members ‘woke-up’ to pay more attention seriously in disaster management issues. Although ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) initiated by Singapore, it is Indonesia that showed the strong engagement and specifically the establishment of the ASEAN Coordinating

Center for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre). Indonesia also played role back then when Cyclone Nargis' landfall in Myanmar in May 2, 2008, such as the suggestion of then Foreign Minister, Hassan Wirajuda, that United Nations Security Council (UNSC) should adopt more coercive measures when Myanmar military junta reject ASEAN entreaties a second time (Bellamy & Beeson, 2010).

The other mentioned by Heiduk (2016) in terms of ASSC is related to haze and air pollution. In terms of haze and air pollution, sadly to say, Indonesia looks like give a large contribution to these kinds of pollution. Sumatera and Kalimantan are two of Indonesia's islands repeatedly causing Southeast Asian haze in 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2019. Illegal slash-and-burn land clearing in those two islands impacted to haze pollution. As the affected neighbors, Singapore and Malaysia, also Brunei Darussalam and

**Table 3**, The author tries to compare several middle power countries. Comparing to the other countries in Indo-Pacific,

Thailand, made pressure to drive this issue becoming a regional issue. The first two were the first ratifying ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution, while Indonesia ratified that haze agreement after a twelve-year delay in September 2014.

#### *Indo-Pacific*

Indonesia, in author opinion, seems to be struggling to maintain its position in Southeast Asia. It looks very hard to leverage Indonesia's power to become considered in the Indo-Pacific region. While Indonesia seems to enjoy the title as 'middle-power country', especially in the Indo-Pacific region, it is important to see how Indonesia's power is. Several reports could describe Indonesia's position based on its power.

A report from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) shows us that Indonesia only surpassed Mexico, in terms of defense spending and military power. In

Indonesia still far behind China, Russia, India, the Republic of Korea, and Australia.

**Table 3. Defense Expenditure and Military Personnel in Selected Middle-Power Countries**

Country	Defense spending									Active Armed Forces	Estimated Reservists	Active Paramilitary
	current US\$ m			per capita (current US\$)			% per GDP					
	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017	(000)	(000)	(000)
Canada	16,158	16,182	17,031	460	458	478	1.04	1.06	1.04	63	30	5
Turkey	8,384	8,664	7,983	106	108	99	0.98	1.00	0.95	355	379	157
Russia	52,201	44,470	45,600	367	312	321	3.83	3.47	3.10	900	2,000	554
Australia	22,034	23,617	24,963	968	1,027	1,075	1.79	1.87	1.80	58	21	0
China	142,409	143,668	150,458	104	104	108	1.27	1.28	1.26	2,035	510	660
India	44,843	51,453	52,494	36	41	41	2.15	2.27	2.15	1,395	1,155	1,586
Indonesia	7,909	7,380	8,981	31	29	34	0.92	0.79	0.89	396	400	280
Korea, Rep.	33,152	33,648	35,674	655	661	697	2.40	2.38	2.33	625	3,100	9
Brazil	23,659	23,551	29,408	116	114	142	1.31	1.31	1.41	335	1,340	395
Mexico	6,015	4,917	4,532	49	40	36	0.52	0.47	0.40	277	82	59
S. Africa	3,534	3,211	3,628	66	59	66	1.11	1.09	1.05	66	0	15

Source: IISS (2018)

Briefly, there are two forms of power. *Hard power* is about coercive power to influence the behavior or interest of the other countries, while *soft power* is about persuasive power.

**Table 3.** The soft power consists of culture, political values, and foreign policy. There is an interesting fact that sometimes economic resources, even military resources, can also produce soft power under certain circumstances (Nye, 2011).

Maybe because of what mentioned by Joseph S. Nye, Jr. before, Lowy Institute did not make a classification based on hard-soft power in their index. The ‘power’ mentioned in its report defined as, “the capacity of a state or territory to *direct* or *influence* the behavior of other states, non-state actors, and the course of international

Soft power tends to attract and co-opt rather or influence than coerce or direct. The military resource is the example kind of hard power as shown in

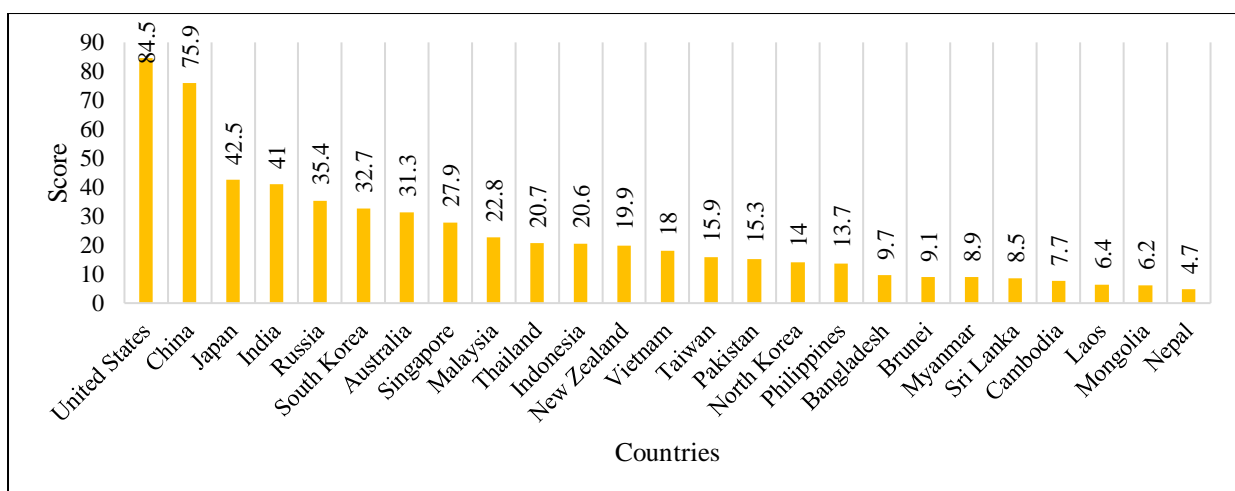
events” (Lowy Institute, 2019). Its index distinguished between two kinds of measurement: *resource*, tells what countries have and *influence*, tells what countries with what they have. Economic resources, military capability, resilience, and future resources are clustered as resource measures. Meanwhile the other four thematic measures of power fall as influence measure: diplomatic influence, economic relationships, defense networks, and cultural influence.

From the report from Lowy Institute titled “Asia Power Index 2019”, we can find that Indonesia is ranked in number 11

from 25 countries. Indonesia gained score 20.6 as an overall score which has a slightly improved score than before in 2018. From the report, we could find the other brief pieces of information depicted in **Error! Reference source not found.** There are only two countries categorized in superpower: The United States and China. The domination of the United States remains pre-eminent power, although considered to become a net underachiever in 2019. The hegemony of the United States

as superpower stated as it is the only one that achieved score more than 70 points. Its challenger, China, got score 75.9 points. Major power countries that categorized achieved a score of  $\geq 40$  points are Japan and India. There are 13 countries considered as middle power which got score 10 points. Indonesia falls into this category. The rest of the eight countries which got score less than 10 points categorized as minor powers.

**Figure 2. Asia Power Index 2019**

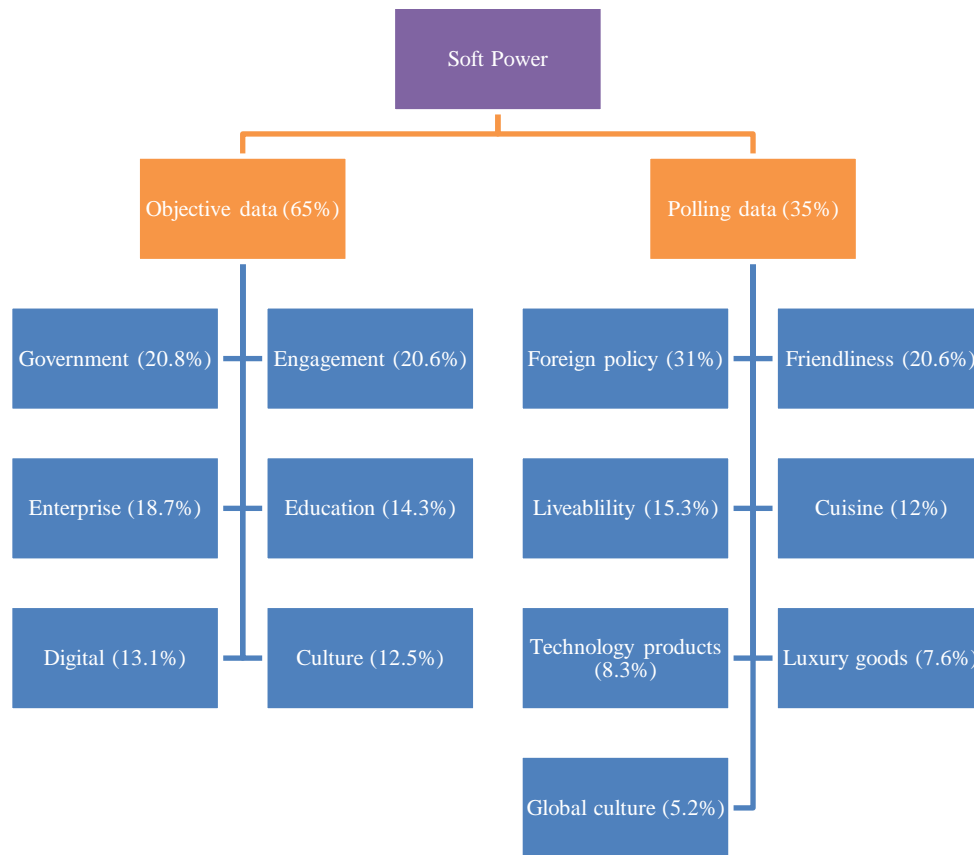


Source: Lowy Institute (2019)

Soft Power 30 Report 2019, produced by Portland Communications, ranked several countries in this world based on soft power they have. The soft power index consists of two kinds of data: objective data (65 percent) and subjective data (35 percent). The objective data structured into six categories: government, engagement, enterprise, education, digital, and culture.

On the other hand, subjective data, where they do international polling to measure it, comprise seven categories: foreign policy, friendliness, livability, cuisine, technology products, luxury goods, and global culture (McClory, 2019). The indices from each kind of data and their weight as mentioned in **Error! Reference source not found.**

**Figure 3. Weighting of the Objective and Polling Categories of the Portland’s Soft Power Index 2019**

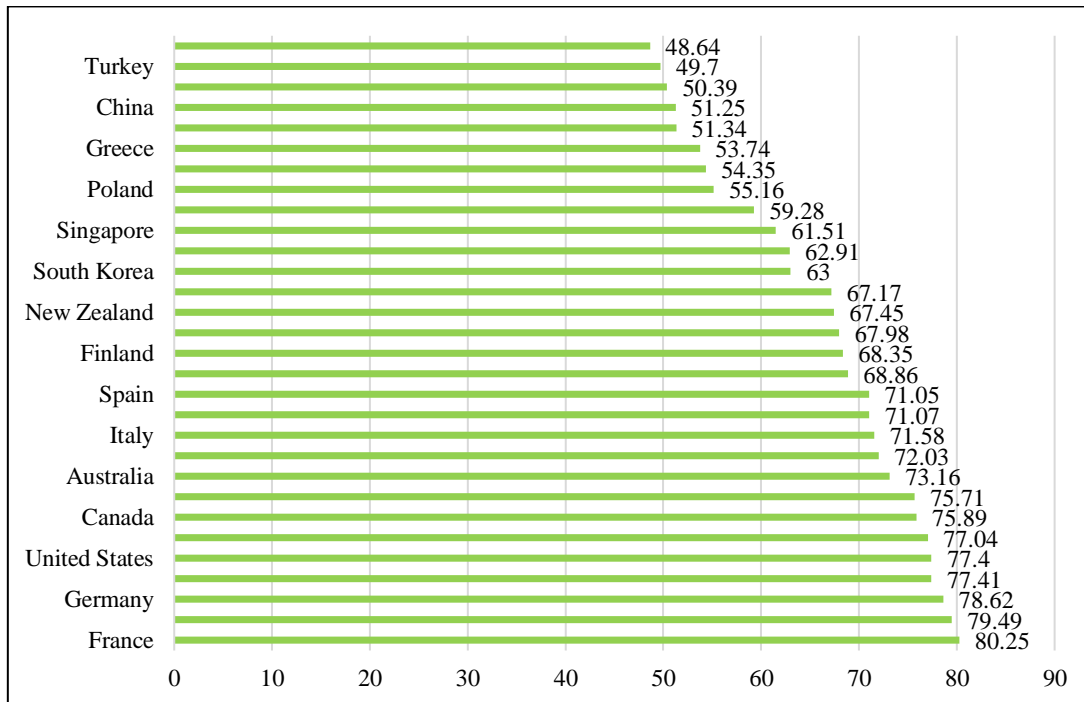


Source: Adapted from McClory (2019)

From **Error! Reference source not found.**, we get information that France has the best soft power in 2019, while Russia has less soft power between 30 countries stated in report. In the Indo-Pacific region, the United States still has the best soft power. The other countries are Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Singapore, China, and Russia. On

the other part of the report, the Asia Soft Power 10, Indonesia reached 9th rank. The Asia Soft Power in 2019 are Japan (75.71), South Korea (63.00), Singapore (61.51), China (51.25), Taiwan (48.11), Thailand (45.60), Malaysia (44.98), India (41.22), Indonesia (40.94), and Philippines (36.64). There will be so much to do for Indonesia to catch up or rank up.

**Figure 4. Portland's Soft Power Rank of 30 Countries**



Source: McClory (2019)

**Conclusion**

Back to the beginning of this article, we have known that national resilience is Indonesia's geostrategy. As mentioned too, the national resilience did not meet applicability of geostrategy or sits outside the geostrategic periphery (Priyono, Herman, & Yusgiantoro, 2017). It is then impacting to the position of Indonesia that 'only' becoming one of middle power countries, and not the best in this category too.

Speaking of Indonesia's role in the Southeast Asia, while determined as dominant player, Indonesia 'only' gain its position as the Assembler and the

Advocator, not the Enforcer. Indonesia's geostrategy regain its influence to the foreign policy principle, Free and Active. Because of Indonesia position as primus inter pares, the geostrategy of Indonesia influencing the ASEAN principle non-interference and using *musyawarah* principle to regain consensus rather than forcing the other state members.

The author finally has a conclusion that there are so much to do if Indonesia want to be a much better player in Indo-Pacific region. Both of hard and soft powers show fewer encouraging results. While military spending in 2020 has a significant increase, it is not much and still very far to catch up

the other countries in the region. One critical aspect in soft power are in government index. Giving serious attention to the policy capacity, like India did (Bajpai & Chong, 2019), could give a best shot.

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