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# From Jokowi to Prabowo: Strategic Continuity in Indonesia–India Relations under Modi’s India

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## ABSTRACT

India and Indonesia occupy increasingly significant positions in the evolving Indo-Pacific strategic order. This article examines Indonesia–India relations across the transition from President Joko Widodo to President Prabowo Subianto, situating this shift within the broader strategic trajectory of Narendra Modi’s India. It asks whether Indonesia’s change in leadership signals policy recalibration or reflects structural continuity in its engagement with India. Rather than being primarily shaped by individual leadership preferences, bilateral alignment is sustained by converging systemic pressures in the Indo-Pacific, institutionalized defence and maritime cooperation frameworks, and shared middle-power aspirations for strategic autonomy within a rules-based regional order. By demonstrating how systemic incentives condition—but do not eliminate leadership agency, this study contributes to debates on foreign policy continuity, middle power diplomacy, and the resilience of strategic partnerships amid domestic political change in the Indo-Pacific.

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Indonesia–India Relations

## I. Introduction

Relations between Indonesia and India are rooted in centuries of civilizational exchange, maritime connectivity, and cultural interaction across the Indian Ocean (Vice President’s Secretariat of India, 2015). From ancient Hindu-Buddhist and later Islamic influences that shaped parts of the Indonesian archipelago to post-independence solidarity within the Non-Aligned Movement, the bilateral relationship has historically reflected both symbolic affinities (Hardiati, 1994). In the contemporary era, these historical ties have evolved into a structured strategic partnership embedded within the broader geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific.

Since President Joko Widodo assumed office in 2014, Indonesia has pursued a pragmatic and infrastructure-driven foreign policy orientation, emphasizing maritime connectivity and economic diplomacy (Humas, 2015). The consolidation of the Indonesia–India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership during Jokowi’s tenure aligned with India’s expanding regional engagement under Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Act East and Indo-Pacific strategies. The election of President Prabowo Subianto for the 2024–2029 term, however, introduces a leadership transition that might plausibly generate foreign policy recalibration. Unlike Jokowi’s economically focused leadership style, Prabowo is widely perceived as more strategic-nationalist with a stronger emphasis on defence and geopolitical positioning (Yadav, 2025). Such differences raise an important analytical question: should leadership transition in Indonesia produce meaningful change in its engagement with India? This question carries broader significance beyond bilateral relations. Indonesia and India occupy pivotal positions in the

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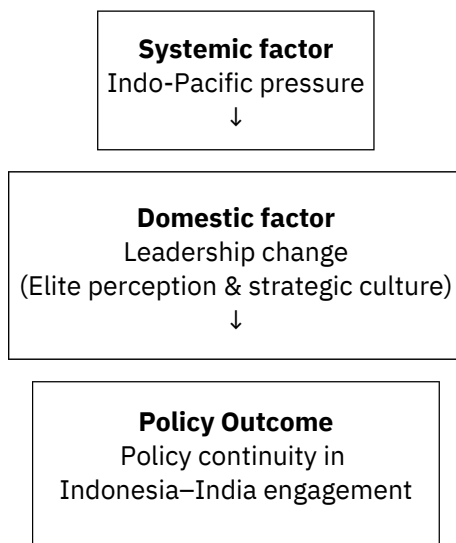
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evolving Indo-Pacific order as emerging middle powers navigating intensifying great-power rivalry (eka, 2026). Much of the existing Indo-Pacific scholarship, however, concentrates on US–China competition, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or India–ASEAN relations at a macro level. The Indonesia–India dyad remains comparatively underexamined, particularly with respect to how domestic political transitions shape its trajectory. Moreover, while leadership change has long been debated in foreign policy analysis, systematic assessments of leadership transition in Southeast Asia remain underdeveloped. The assumption that new leaders necessarily recalibrate foreign policy priorities often goes untested in emerging middle powers.

This article addresses this gap by examining Indonesia–India relations across the transition from Jokowi (2014–2019; 2019–2024) to Prabowo (2024–2029) within the structural context of Modi’s assertive Indo-Pacific orientation. It asks: To what extent does Indonesia–India strategic partnership reflect structural imperatives rather than leadership preference? The central argument advanced here is that, despite leadership transition from Jokowi to Prabowo, Indonesia–India relations demonstrate substantial strategic continuity driven by structural Indo-Pacific realignments, convergent middle-power aspirations for strategic autonomy, and shared maritime security concerns under Modi’s increasingly consolidated regional strategy.

Theoretically, this study adopts a neoclassical realist framework to explain foreign policy continuity amid domestic political change. Neoclassical realism posits that systemic pressures—such as shifts in regional power distribution and security competition—shape state behavior, but these pressures are mediated through domestic-level variables, including elite perception, strategic culture, and leadership interpretation (Ripsman et al., 2016). In this context, leadership transition functions as an intervening variable rather than a determining variable in shaping Indonesia’s India policy. While individual leaders may adjust emphasis or rhetoric, structural incentives embedded in the Indo-Pacific strategic environment constrain the range of viable policy alternatives. The causal mechanism proposed in this article, therefore, proceeds as follows:

**Table 1**  
**Neoclassical Realist Framework on the Foreign Policy Framework**



Source: Made by Author

Methodologically, this study is based on a qualitative comparative case study of Indonesia–India relations across two presidential administrations. The analysis relies on a systematic examination of official policy documents, joint statements, defence cooperation agreements, trade and economic data, and elite policy narratives between 2014 and 2025. By tracing patterns of diplomatic engagement,

defence institutionalization, and strategic discourse across the leadership transition, the study assesses whether observable policy outputs reflect recalibration or continuity.

By foregrounding the interaction between systemic constraints and leadership agency, this article contributes to three strands of scholarship. First, it advances debates on foreign policy continuity by demonstrating how leadership change does not necessarily disrupt structurally embedded strategic alignments. Second, it enriches middle power diplomacy literature by examining how convergent strategic autonomy agendas sustain bilateral partnerships outside great-power frameworks. Third, it expands Indo-Pacific studies beyond major power rivalry by offering a focused analysis of the Indonesia–India dyad as a stabilizing axis within the regional order.

The neoclassical realist framework guides the analysis. Subsequent sections examine Indonesia–India relations under Jokowi, early policy signals under Prabowo, and the structural drivers underpinning continuity. The article concludes by reflecting on the implications of leadership transitions for middle-power partnerships in the Indo-Pacific.

## RESULT

### Modi's India as a Structural Variable in the Indo-Pacific Order

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy outlook on systemic factors is shaped by a perception that the global order is undergoing a structural transformation characterized by power diffusion, intensifying geopolitical competition, and the gradual shift of economic and strategic gravity toward the Indo-Pacific (Bhatia, 2026). From New Delhi's perspective, the post–Cold War liberal order—long dominated by Western powers—is evolving into a more multipolar configuration in which emerging powers must secure greater strategic autonomy and regional influence.

Within this changing global structure, Modi's strategic thinking places the Indo-Pacific at the center of India's geopolitical calculus. The region is perceived as the primary arena where economic connectivity, maritime security, and major-power competition intersect. India views the Indo-Pacific not merely as a geographical construct but as a strategic system linking the Indian Ocean and the Pacific through trade routes, energy flows, and naval mobility (Baruah, 2020). This systemic perception informs India's effort to expand its diplomatic, economic, and security engagement across Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the broader Indian Ocean region.

A central systemic concern shaping Modi's worldview is China's rapid rise and expanding maritime presence. Beijing's growing naval capabilities, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the development of strategic infrastructure across the Indian Ocean are interpreted in New Delhi as altering the regional balance of power (Baruah, 2018). Rather than pursuing confrontation, India's response under Modi has focused on strengthening strategic partnerships, expanding maritime domain awareness, and reinforcing India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean (Chadha, 2025).

The transformation of India's regional posture under Prime Minister Narendra Modi constitutes a critical structural variable shaping the Indo-Pacific strategic environment within which Indonesia formulates its foreign policy. Rather than treating India merely as a bilateral partner, this section conceptualizes Modi's India as part of the broader systemic pressures that condition Indonesia's strategic choices. In neoclassical realist terms, India's evolving regional activism contributes to the external constraints and incentives that shape Indonesia's policy continuity across leadership transition.

This systemic assessment explains the consolidation of several policy frameworks under Modi's leadership. Since assuming office in 2014, Modi has consolidated India's outward-looking orientation through the intensification of the Act East Policy (Gaens & Ruohomaki, 2017). While Act East originated under previous administrations, Modi elevated it from diplomatic engagement to strategic integration, deepening defence cooperation, connectivity initiatives, and maritime collaboration with Southeast Asian

states (Caudhury, 2025). This shift embedded India more firmly within Indo-Pacific strategic architectures, increasing its salience for regional middle powers such as Indonesia.

A central doctrinal pillar of Modi's regional approach is the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) framework, which emphasizes maritime security, blue economy cooperation, and capacity-building across the Indian Ocean (Kumar, 2025). Under Prime Minister Modi, India's maritime policy has expanded from the SAGAR doctrine toward the MAHASAGAR initiative (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions), indicating a broader effort to project India's influence across regional and global maritime spaces. This shift reflects New Delhi's aspiration to position itself as a central actor in shaping maritime security and governance in the Indo-Pacific (Ministry of Home Affairs of India, 2025). For Indonesia—an archipelagic state advancing its own Global Maritime Fulcrum vision under Jokowi—India's maritime expansion generates structural alignment rather than competition. Shared concerns over sea lane security, piracy, and strategic chokepoints such as the Malacca Strait and the Andaman Sea create convergent threat perceptions.

India's pursuit of strategic autonomy further reinforces its compatibility with Indonesia's long-standing non-aligned foreign policy doctrine (Monnappa, 2025). While India has deepened engagement with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), it has simultaneously resisted formal alliance commitments, preserving policy flexibility (Ashwarya, 2025). This calibrated positioning allows Indonesia to engage India without undermining ASEAN centrality or its own hedging posture vis-à-vis major powers. In this sense, India's selective alignment strategy reduces the political cost for Indonesia to sustain strategic cooperation across leadership transitions.

Defence modernization under Modi also contributes to the structural environment. Expanded naval capabilities, indigenous defence production initiatives under "Atmanirbhar Bharat," and growing defence exports to Southeast Asia signal India's long-term commitment to regional security presence (Press Information Bureau of India, 2025). For Indonesia, which seeks diversified defence partnerships amid intensifying US–China rivalry, India represents a supplementary security partner that does not carry the same geopolitical baggage as major powers. This structural opportunity persists regardless of changes in Indonesia's domestic leadership configuration.

Finally, Modi's economic nationalism and supply chain diversification strategies interact with Indonesia's own resource diplomacy and downstream industrialization agenda (Isaac, 2026). Although bilateral trade volumes remain modest compared to Indonesia's trade with China or Japan, both states share an interest in reducing overdependence on a single major power and strengthening South–South economic corridors. These convergent economic objectives contribute to the institutionalization of cooperation frameworks that are resilient to leadership turnover.

At the same time, Modi's strategic worldview emphasizes strategic autonomy as a core organizing principle of India's external relations. While India participates in multilateral security arrangements such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the United States, Japan, and Australia, it continues to avoid formal alliance commitments (Zajączkowski & Pulami, 2025). This approach allows India to engage multiple partners while preserving decision-making independence within a fluid regional order.

From a systemic perspective, Modi interprets the Indo-Pacific as a contested yet opportunity-rich strategic space in which India must simultaneously balance rising-power competition, secure maritime interests, and expand its diplomatic footprint. This perception of shifting global power distribution and maritime strategic competition constitutes a key structural driver shaping India's external engagement with regional middle powers, including Indonesia.

Taken together, these developments suggest that Modi's India has become embedded in the Indo-Pacific strategic landscape as a stable external reference point. From a neoclassical realist perspective,

this external structural configuration constrains the range of viable policy alternatives available to Indonesian leaders. Whether under Jokowi or Prabowo, the systemic incentives to maintain engagement with India remain largely constant. Leadership transition, therefore, operates within an already structured strategic environment shaped in part by India's sustained regional activism.

### **Jokowi's Indonesia: Maritime Developmentalism and Strategic Pragmatism**

President Joko Widodo's perception of systemic dynamics in the global and Indo-Pacific environment was shaped less by traditional geopolitical competition and more by economic transformation and maritime connectivity. Unlike leaders who prioritize ideological or security-driven foreign policy agendas, Jokowi approached the evolving regional order primarily through a developmental lens. The shifting center of global economic gravity toward Asia and the growing strategic importance of maritime trade routes informed Jakarta's emphasis on strengthening Indonesia's role as a maritime hub linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Shekhar & Liow, 2014).

Within this systemic context, Jokowi interpreted the Indo-Pacific not primarily as a theatre of great-power rivalry but as an arena of economic interdependence and maritime governance. Jokowi perceived the Indo-Pacific less as a geopolitical battleground and more as a maritime economic space in which Indonesia could leverage its archipelagic geography to enhance connectivity, trade, and regional cooperation (Cabinet Secretary of the Republic of Indonesia, 2018).

Upon assuming office in 2014, Jokowi introduced the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) as the central organizing vision of Indonesia's strategic outlook. The GMF emphasized maritime infrastructure development, sea lane security, port connectivity, and the revitalization of Indonesia's archipelagic identity. Although initially framed in ambitious geopolitical language, the doctrine evolved into a policy instrument focused primarily on domestic economic transformation and maritime capacity-building rather than external power projection (Laksmana, 2019). This orientation reflected a broader pattern of maritime developmentalism: foreign policy was increasingly subordinated to economic growth objectives and infrastructure modernization.

His Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) vision reflected this perception by prioritizing maritime infrastructure, port development, sea-lane security, and connectivity across the archipelago. Rather than positioning Indonesia as a balancing power within regional security competition, the GMF framed Indonesia as a maritime connector capable of facilitating trade flows and regional cooperation (Munabari & Sellita, 2024).

Jokowi's foreign policy style was marked by economic pragmatism. Economic diplomacy became a defining feature of Indonesia's external engagement, with Jakarta actively seeking investment partnerships to support national development priorities (Haryono, 2019). Within this framework, India was not approached as an ideological ally or strategic counterweight, but as a complementary maritime partner capable of contributing to Indonesia's port development, connectivity initiatives, and defence diversification. The emphasis remained functional rather than doctrinal.

At the same time, Jokowi's interpretation of systemic pressures also reflected Indonesia's long-standing commitment to strategic autonomy through 'Bebas-Aktif' (free and active) foreign policy (Wardhani & Dugis, 2023). While acknowledging the intensifying rivalry between the United States and China, Jakarta under Jokowi avoided formal alignment with any major power. Upon assuming office in 2014, Jokowi introduced the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) as the central organizing vision of Indonesia's strategic outlook. The GMF emphasized maritime infrastructure development, sea lane security, port connectivity, and the revitalization of Indonesia's archipelagic identity. Although initially framed in ambitious geopolitical language, the doctrine evolved into a policy instrument focused primarily on domestic economic transformation and maritime capacity-building rather than external power projection (Laksmana, 2019). This orientation reflected a broader pattern of maritime developmentalism: foreign policy was increasingly subordinated to economic growth objectives and infrastructure modernization.

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From a neoclassical realist perspective, Jokowi's leadership mediated systemic pressures through a developmentalist strategic culture. The rise of China, the increasing centrality of maritime trade routes, and the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic concept generated external incentives for Indonesia to strengthen maritime partnerships. However, these systemic dynamics were filtered through Jokowi's pragmatic leadership orientation, which prioritized economic deliverables and infrastructure diplomacy over overt geopolitical positioning. As a result, Indonesia's response to structural change was shaped less by balancing imperatives and more by developmental objectives.

This orientation was reflected in Indonesia's cautious balancing posture amid intensifying US–China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific (Rayhana, 2023). While Indonesia deepened economic ties with China—particularly through Belt and Road–linked infrastructure projects—it avoided formal alignment and resisted strategic polarization (Pasaribu et al., 2023). Maritime incidents in the North Natuna Sea demonstrated Jakarta's willingness to defend sovereignty, yet these tensions were consistently framed in legal rather than confrontational terms (Majumdar, 2021). Such calibrated balancing reduced incentives for abrupt foreign policy shift toward any single partner, including India.

Within this broader strategic posture, Indonesia's engagement with India under Jokowi exhibited convergence without alliance formation. Maritime cooperation, coordinated patrols near the Andaman Sea, defence dialogues, and port development initiatives—particularly in Sabang—reflected shared interests in Indian Ocean security. The elevation of bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signaled institutional consolidation rather than ideological alignment. In this context, India's SAGAR doctrine and Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) overlapped in their emphasis on maritime security and connectivity, creating structural compatibility between the two countries' strategic outlooks (Gupta, 2018).

Jokowi's limited ideological orientation in foreign policy further reinforced this pattern of continuity. Unlike leaders who emphasize normative or civilizational diplomacy, his administration prioritized tangible outcomes. As long as cooperation with India aligned with Indonesia's development agenda and maritime security priorities, there was little domestic incentive for policy recalibration. In neoclassical realist terms, systemic Indo-Pacific pressures—particularly maritime competition and supply chain diversification—were translated through a developmentalist lens that favored stability and incremental institutionalization over

strategic rupture.

Consequently, Indonesia's response to Modi's expanding regional role was neither reactive alignment nor strategic distancing. Instead, India was incorporated into Indonesia's broader hedging strategy, which emphasized diversification of security partnerships, enhancement of maritime domain awareness, and preservation of diplomatic flexibility. Over time, this approach led to the institutional embedding of Indonesia–India cooperation across defence, maritime, and economic domains, making the relationship increasingly routinized by the end of Jokowi's presidency.

This institutionalization was reinforced by sustained high-level diplomatic engagement. Between 2014 and 2024, President Jokowi visited India four times, indicating Indonesia's recognition of India as a key strategic partner in South Asia. Reciprocally, India was the most frequent South Asian visitor to Indonesia, with four high-level visits, compared to fewer engagements from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan (Antara, 2015; Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2018, 2022). This pattern reflects India's growing strategic relevance as a major Indo-Pacific actor and a maritime partner whose priorities increasingly intersect with Indonesia's GMF vision. The frequency of bilateral exchanges suggests that India's rising geopolitical and economic profile translated into sustained diplomatic attention from Jakarta.

Economic engagement further illustrates this structural relationship. Between 2019 and 2024, India consistently accounted for the largest share of Indonesia's trade with South Asia, with total trade increasing from USD 19.19 billion in 2019 to USD 28.38 billion in 2024 (Brief Embassy Report on Bilateral Relations – ITJ Division, DGCI&S, Kolkata., 2024.; Commercial Intelligence and Statistics of India, 2023). Although trade peaked in 2022 before moderating, this fluctuation reflects post-pandemic normalization rather than disengagement. The persistence of high trade volumes indicates that Indonesia–India economic relations are structural rather than cyclical.

This pattern underscores India's role as Indonesia's primary economic gateway to South Asia, supported by complementarities in energy, commodities, manufacturing inputs, and maritime connectivity. The resilience of trade flows despite global disruptions points to a form of strategic economic interdependence, which reinforces broader geopolitical convergence within the Indo-Pacific framework.

Beyond trade, the substantive scope of bilateral cooperation under Jokowi further demonstrates the depth of the partnership. Compared to other South Asian countries, Indonesia–India relations are more comprehensive and forward-looking, anchored in maritime and defence collaboration as core pillars. This includes cooperation in maritime security, defence industry development, and Indo-Pacific stability. These security dimensions are complemented by expanding partnerships in trade, infrastructure, energy, and manufacturing, as well as emerging cooperation in renewable energy, digital technology, and research capacity building. At the societal level, people-to-people exchanges—through education, tourism, interfaith dialogue, and civil society engagement—contribute to long-term relational stability (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2018a). Taken together, these dimensions reflect a mature

partnership that extends beyond symbolic engagement toward operational convergence.

This institutional depth is analytically significant. By the time of the leadership transition in 2024, Indonesia–India relations were no longer dependent on personal rapport or ad hoc initiatives. Instead, they were anchored in established defence mechanisms, recurring diplomatic engagements, and convergent maritime frameworks. Consequently, the transition to Prabowo’s presidency occurred within a structured policy environment shaped by maritime developmentalism and strategic pragmatism, limiting the scope for abrupt policy deviation.

### **Prabowo’s Indonesia: Defense Nationalism and Strategic Consolidation**

The transition from President Joko Widodo to President Prabowo Subianto introduces a leadership profile associated with a stronger emphasis on defence and strategic nationalism. However, rather than assuming policy rupture, this section assesses whether early foreign policy signals under Prabowo indicate substantive recalibration or consolidation within existing structural constraints. Given the early stage of his administration, the analysis focuses on observable policy direction and institutional continuity rather than long-term projection.

Prabowo’s political trajectory has been closely tied to defence affairs and military modernization. His tenure as Minister of Defence underscored Indonesia’s commitment to upgrading military capabilities, diversifying procurement sources, and strengthening deterrence posture (Hakim, 2026). This orientation continues under his presidency, reflected in sustained emphasis on naval expansion, air force modernization, and domestic defence industry development. Rather than representing a strategic departure, these priorities intensify Indonesia’s existing modernization trajectory within the Minimum Essential Force framework.

At the level of foreign policy doctrine, early signals indicate continuity in Indonesia’s longstanding commitment to strategic autonomy and non-alignment. Official statements emphasize sovereignty protection, maritime security, and balanced engagement with major powers, without indicating any departure from ASEAN centrality or Indonesia’s Indo-Pacific Outlook (Cabinet Secretary of the Republic of Indonesia, 2026). This suggests that Prabowo’s defense nationalism operates within an established hedging strategy, combining capability enhancement with diplomatic flexibility.

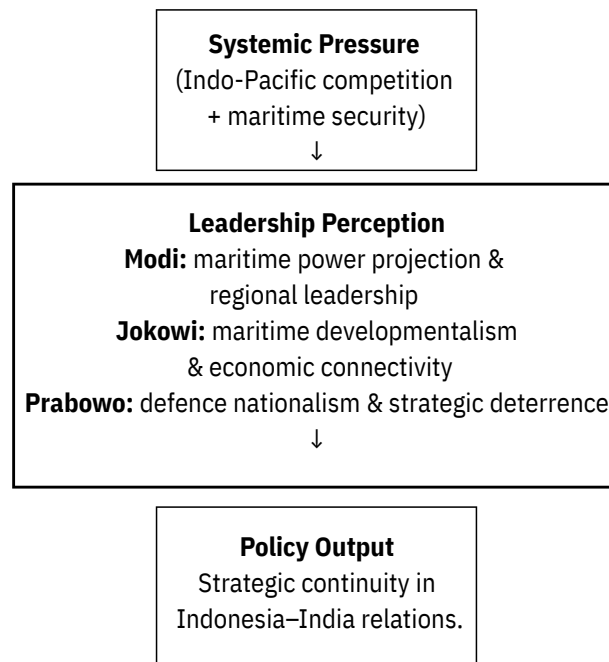
Empirically, this continuity is reflected in Indonesia’s sustained engagement with India. Early diplomatic exchanges and defence dialogues point to ongoing cooperation in naval collaboration, maritime domain awareness, and defence industrial linkages. India continues to function as a complementary partner within Indonesia’s broader effort to diversify external security relationships without escalating geopolitical tensions. The absence of policy retrenchment or rhetorical distancing indicates that bilateral relations remain embedded within institutional frameworks established during the previous administration.

Prabowo’s state visit to India from 23–26 January 2025 further illustrates this pattern of consolidation.

His role as Chief Guest at India's 76th Republic Day symbolically elevated bilateral ties, while substantively advancing cooperation through twelve memoranda of understanding spanning defence, energy, health, maritime security, cyber cooperation, and the digital economy (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2025). The near-finalization of a US\$450 million BrahMos supersonic missile agreement—featuring technology transfer and potential local production—highlights the deepening of defence cooperation alongside Indonesia's broader modernization agenda (Strangio, 2026). Parallel developments in energy security, renewable cooperation, and health diplomacy demonstrate a preference for multidimensional partnerships in which security cooperation is embedded within wider economic and technological engagement.

From a neoclassical realist perspective, these developments reflect the interaction between systemic pressures and leadership perception. Prabowo interprets the evolving Indo-Pacific environment primarily through the lens of intensifying security competition, maritime vulnerability, and shifting power balances (Yadav, 2025). The Indo-Pacific is thus understood not only as an economic space but as a strategic theatre where naval capability, technological competition, and geopolitical rivalry shape regional stability. However, this perception does not translate into alignment behavior. Instead, it reinforces Indonesia's strategic autonomy by emphasizing defence capability, partnership diversification, and maritime resilience.

**Table 2:**  
**Neoclassical Realist Framework on the Foreign Policy Framework  
Between Indonesia-India under Jokowi-Prabowo and Modi Leadership**



Source: Made by Author

Within this structural context, defence modernization becomes a functional response to systemic pressures. The growing importance of secure sea lanes, coupled with regional military expansion, elevates the strategic value of Indonesia's archipelagic geography. Strengthening naval and air capabilities is therefore framed as necessary for credible deterrence and sovereignty protection (Kementerian Pertahanan RI, 2022). Procurement initiatives—

including advanced missile systems and major platform acquisitions—illustrate how systemic incentives are translated into national defence priorities.

Despite this more security-oriented interpretation of the regional environment, the underlying logic of Indonesia–India relations remains stable. Shared interests in maritime security, strategic autonomy, and Indo-Pacific stability continue to provide a basis for cooperation. Leadership transition thus affects emphasis and policy tempo, but not the strategic direction of engagement. Indonesia’s partnership with India is sustained not by personal leadership alignment, but by converging structural incentives and institutionalized cooperation.

In this sense, Prabowo’s leadership represents strategic consolidation rather than recalibration. His defence-oriented approach reinforces existing patterns of engagement while operating within the same structural constraints that shaped policy under Jokowi. Consequently, Indonesia’s India policy remains embedded in a broader framework of middle-power hedging, where diversification, flexibility, and autonomy continue to guide foreign policy behavior.

### **Comparative Analysis: Continuity or Strategic Recalibration?**

The preceding sections examined Indonesia–India relations under contrasting leadership profiles: Jokowi’s maritime developmentalism and Prabowo’s defence-centric strategic nationalism. The central analytical question is whether leadership transition produced meaningful recalibration or whether continuity predominates across core strategic dimensions. Rather than narrating policy developments, this section compares key domains of bilateral engagement to assess patterns of persistence and adjustment.

Under Jokowi, maritime cooperation with India aligned with the Global Maritime Fulcrum vision, emphasizing connectivity, port development (including Sabang), and coordinated patrols near the Andaman Sea. Maritime collaboration was embedded within economic and infrastructure priorities (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2018b). Under Prabowo, maritime security remains central, but with greater emphasis on deterrence and on strengthening naval capabilities. However, there is no evidence of reduction or doctrinal shift in cooperation with India. It assesses a substantial continuity. The maritime domain reflects structural imperatives rooted in shared Indian Ocean security and global political concerns rather than leadership preference.

Jokowi’s later term saw the gradual consolidation of defence dialogues and the diversification of partners, including India. Defence cooperation was institutionalized but not rhetorically foregrounded. Prabowo’s presidency places stronger rhetorical and operational emphasis on defence modernization and procurement. However, India remains a complementary security partner in Indonesia’s diversification strategy. It assesses a tactical recalibration of emphasis but strategic continuity of direction. Defence nationalism intensifies cooperation rather than reorients it.

Under Jokowi, economic pragmatism guided engagement. India is regarded as a credible and strategic partner, particularly in connectivity and energy cooperation. Under Prabowo, early signals indicate continuity in trade diversification and downstream industrialization priorities. There is no observable decoupling or reprioritization away from India.

It assesses a continuity driven by economic diversification logic and shared South–South developmental aspirations.

Jokowi maintained Indonesia’s Indo-Pacific Outlook while avoiding formal alignment in great-power blocs. Engagement with India was compatible with ASEAN centrality and hedging behavior. Prabowo’s discourse emphasizes sovereignty and strategic autonomy but does not depart from Indonesia’s non-aligned tradition. India’s strategic autonomy posture facilitates sustained alignment without entanglement in alliances. It assesses strong structural continuity. Both administrations operate within

Indonesia's long-standing hedging architecture.

Under Jokowi, economic interdependence with China coexisted with maritime friction in the North Natuna Sea. Indonesia avoided overt balancing behavior. Under Prabowo, defence modernization could be interpreted as a form of subtle deterrence signalling. However, there is no evidence of explicit alignment with India against China. It assesses a continuity in calibrated balancing. China functions as a structural constraint shaping Indonesia's diversification strategy, including engagement with India. Across these five dimensions, the evidence indicates that:

1. Maritime and Indo-Pacific positioning show strong structural continuity.
2. Defence ties demonstrate recalibration in emphasis but not strategic redirection.
3. Economic engagement remains pragmatically stable.
4. The China factor operates as a systemic driver rather than a leadership-dependent variable.
5. The strategic autonomy of India and the "Bebas-Aktif" are shared as policy principles.

Leadership transition, therefore, modifies tempo, rhetoric, and prioritization, but does not fundamentally alter Indonesia's India policy trajectory. This comparative analysis returns to the theoretical framework. Does Indonesia's India policy reflect structural determination, or does leadership agency meaningfully shape outcomes? From a neoclassical realist perspective, systemic pressures in the Indo-Pacific constitute the primary explanatory layer. Intensifying maritime competition, strategic uncertainty generated by US–China rivalry, and India's own consolidation as a regional security actor create enduring incentives for Indonesia to maintain diversified partnerships. These pressures constrain the range of viable foreign policy alternatives available to Indonesian leaders. However, structural determinism alone is insufficient. Leadership agency remains visible in three domains:

1. Rhetorical framing — Jokowi emphasized development; Prabowo emphasizes defence sovereignty.
2. Policy tempo — Defence cooperation may accelerate under Prabowo.
3. Symbolic signaling — Leadership style affects diplomatic messaging.

Yet these variations operate within structural boundaries. Leadership transition functions as an intervening variable rather than a determining force. Structural incentives shape the strategic direction, while leadership influences emphasis and implementation. This finding carries broader implications for middle-power diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific. Emerging middle powers such as Indonesia operate within increasingly dense strategic environments where autonomy is preserved through diversification rather than realignment. Bilateral partnerships that are institutionalized within defence, maritime, and economic frameworks become resilient to domestic political turnover. In such contexts, leadership change does not automatically translate into foreign policy rupture.

The Indonesia–India case, therefore, challenges assumptions that personalist leadership styles in emerging democracies necessarily generate policy volatility. Instead, it demonstrates how structural imperatives and institutional embedding can stabilize bilateral partnerships even amid leadership transition. For Indo-Pacific scholarship, this suggests that middle-power interactions deserve greater analytical attention beyond major power rivalry frameworks.

## Conclusion

This article set out to examine whether Indonesia's leadership transition from Joko Widodo to Prabowo Subianto represents a rupture or recalibration in Indonesia–India relations within the broader context of Narendra Modi's evolving Indo-Pacific strategy. Contrary to assumptions that leadership change in emerging democracies necessarily produces foreign policy volatility, the findings demonstrate substantial strategic continuity across administrations. While rhetorical emphasis and policy tempo differ—maritime developmentalism under Jokowi and defence-centric assertiveness under Prabowo—the underlying trajectory of Indonesia–India engagement remains anchored in structural Indo-Pacific imperatives.

The analysis has shown that maritime cooperation, defence institutionalization, economic diversification, and calibrated balancing vis-à-vis China persist across leadership transitions. Tactical recalibration is observable in the heightened defence emphasis under Prabowo, yet this shift intensifies rather than redirects established strategic frameworks. Leadership transition thus operates as an intervening variable shaping implementation and signaling, but not fundamentally altering Indonesia's India policy.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce a neoclassical realist interpretation of foreign policy continuity. Systemic pressures—particularly intensifying maritime competition, strategic uncertainty generated by US–China rivalry, and India's consolidation as a regional security actor—constrain the policy alternatives available to Indonesian leaders. At the same time, leadership agency remains relevant in mediating emphasis, institutional prioritization, and diplomatic rhetoric. The Indonesia–India case, therefore, illustrates how structural incentives and domestic agency interact to produce continuity within bounded flexibility. This contributes to broader debates on foreign policy change by demonstrating that middle powers embedded in dense regional security environments exhibit greater resilience to leadership turnover than often assumed.

The findings also carry implications for middle power diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific. As regional fragmentation deepens and strategic competition intensifies, middle powers increasingly rely on diversified partnerships rather than exclusive alignments. Indonesia's sustained engagement with India reflects this logic of strategic diversification. Rather than serving as a balancing coalition against a single major power, the partnership functions as part of a broader hedging architecture aimed at preserving autonomy and minimizing vulnerability.

For ASEAN centrality, the continuity of Indonesia–India relations reinforces the region's capacity to maintain diplomatic equilibrium amid great-power rivalry. India's own commitment to strategic autonomy and selective alignment reduces the risk that bilateral cooperation undermines ASEAN-led mechanisms. In this sense, the durability of Indonesia–India engagement supports a plural and non-exclusive Indo-Pacific order in which middle powers retain maneuvering space. The case suggests that ASEAN centrality is more likely to be preserved when member states institutionalize diversified partnerships rather than pivot toward rigid bloc politics.

Looking ahead to the evolving Modi–Prabowo era, the trajectory of Indonesia–India relations is likely to remain conditioned by structural maritime and security incentives. Continued naval modernization, supply chain diversification, and Indian Ocean governance initiatives will provide enduring grounds for cooperation. However, the depth of engagement will depend not only on systemic pressures but also on institutional capacity and economic complementarities. Rather than anticipating dramatic realignment, the more plausible trajectory is incremental consolidation within existing strategic parameters.

In a fragmenting Indo-Pacific order characterized by fluid alignments and intensifying competition, the Indonesia–India case underscores a broader pattern: leadership change does not automatically disrupt structurally embedded partnerships among middle powers. Strategic continuity, mediated through institutionalization and shared autonomy-seeking behavior, may prove more characteristic of middle power diplomacy than episodic realignment. Recognizing this dynamic enriches our understanding of how regional order evolves beyond the actions of major powers and highlights the stabilizing potential of resilient middle-power partnerships.

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