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## Emerging India-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

*Udai Bhanu Singh\**

India and Indonesia recently upgraded bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, a move that comes on the eve of 70 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. This deeper engagement serves to highlight the importance of the Indo-Pacific for both countries. India and Indonesia have recently witnessed some intensive engagement in the political, strategic, defence, security, and economic spheres. There have been a number of meetings at the ministerial level, especially those concerned with Foreign Affairs, Security, Defence and Trade as well as the visit of the Chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces to India. A key event was the January 2018 meeting of Indian Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi and Indonesian President Joko Widodo. This was followed by another meeting in May 2018, during the Indian PM's five-day, three-nation tour of Southeast Asia, covering Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, where he delivered the Keynote Address at the Shangri-La Dialogue.

India-Indonesia relations have a rich history, with close collaboration during the anti-colonial freedom struggle between the national leadership of India (led by Jawaharlal Nehru) and Indonesia (led by Sukarno) and later in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). India and Indonesia were co-founders of NAM and successfully hosted the Bandung Conference in 1955.

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More recently, former Indonesian President Yudhoyono visited India in 2005 when a joint declaration on establishing strategic partnership was issued. President Yudhoyono was also Chief Guest at India's Republic Day in 2011. After taking over as PM, Modi met the Indonesian President on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit (EAS) held in Nay Pyi Taw in 2014. This was followed by a visit by former Vice President Mohammad Hamid Ansari to Indonesia on the invitation of his counterpart Jusuf Kalla in 2015, where he met the President Widodo and former President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

#### EMERGING STRATEGIC SCENARIO

The emergence of the 'Indo-Pacific' as a geopolitical construct and China's preference for the 'Asia Pacific' indicates the brewing contestation—at the levels of ideas and real power—in the region. Even as India's Look East Policy was transforming to the Act East Policy, China was extending its reach in to the Pacific and Indian Oceans. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) offers many inducements to its neighbours, but also encroaches on sovereign territorial claims. India rejected China's offer to join the BRI Summit citing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which passes through the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK).

As Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto points out in an article in *Jakarta Post*: 'China's economic security is utterly dependent on Beijing's ability to secure markets and sea lanes that traverse the Indian and Pacific Oceans—the Indo-Pacific.'<sup>1</sup> He further points out: 'Between Delhi and Beijing lies Jakarta. Control over the Indo-Pacific requires control over the Indonesian archipelago. Indonesia has thus become a new battleground of Sino-Indian rivalry.'<sup>2</sup> While Indonesia has economic interests vis-à-vis China, it is wary of a strategic entanglement with the latter. On the other hand, India does not want the experience of the Doklam standoff, which occurred in 2017 on its land border with China, cloud its vision either. The common strategic interests and concerns open up space for cooperation between India and Indonesia.

#### DEFENCE AND SECURITY COOPERATION

As the biggest Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member in its neighbourhood, Indonesia constitutes an important part of India's Act East Policy. It may be re-called here that India and Indonesia had signed a Defence Agreement in 2001. The bilateral relationship was

subsequently upgraded to a strategic partnership in 2005, and is now upgraded further to a comprehensive strategic partnership.

Indonesia's foreign policy under Widodo still retains the 1948 tenet, *bebas dan aktif* (independent and active), and Sukarno's *trisakti* (three pillars of the state), namely, an Indonesia that is sovereign, economically independent, and with a strong socio-cultural identity.<sup>3</sup> The principal doctrinal tenets of the Tentara Nasional Indonesia's (TNI), that is, the Indonesian National Armed Forces, are: National Resilience (*ketahanan nasional*), People's Defence and Security (*hankamrata*), and the archipelagic doctrine (*wawasan nusantara*). The *dwifungsi* (dual function) role of the military has been done away with in favour of the 'New Paradigm' doctrine, which is supportive of democracy and civilian rule. This, coupled with Indonesia's practice of moderate Islam, explains the affinity between Indonesia and India with regard to political and social ideals.

Bilateral relations have spanned the spectrum from military-to-military relations, including exchange of high-level visits by the Service Chiefs, and space collaboration, marked by the launch of two Indonesian satellites—LAPAN A2 in September 2015 and LAPAN A3 in June 2016—from India.

The Defence Agreement between the two countries signed during the Indian PM's 2018 visit is an important one. India and Indonesia have agreed to start a regular bilateral dialogue and consultation on strategic defence and military issues of common interest, exchange of strategic information, military education, training and exercise, cooperation among the armed forces, humanitarian aid, disaster relief, peace-keeping and medical services, among others. There is also scope for further cooperation in dealing with identity politics, radicalism and extremism.

India and Indonesia have many avenues of cooperation open to them. Both countries can play a supportive role for each other in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Navy (IN) and Indonesian Navy (TNI AL) have been conducting coordinated patrols in the Indian Ocean twice a year since 2002; the latest iteration was the 31st India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) in May-June 2018.<sup>4</sup> This is aimed at better interoperability, ensuring good order in the maritime domain besides strengthening the existing ties with Indonesia.<sup>5</sup>

The Framework Agreement between India's Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Indonesia's Lembaga Penerbangan dan Antariksa Nasional (LAPAN or National Institute of Aeronautics and

Space) was also signed for cooperation in the exploration and uses of Outer Space for peaceful purposes. This agreement has been further buttressed by a third Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two countries on scientific and technological cooperation, which would support collaboration in information and communication technology, marine science and technology, energy research, disaster management, geospatial information, and applied chemistry, etc.

The other possibilities of defence cooperation include the following:<sup>6</sup>

- (a) Joint aerial maritime surveillance along the Six Degree Channel.
- (b) India provides servicing facilities to Indonesian Air Force's Sukhoi fleet.
- (c) Jointing research and development (R&D) in missile technology and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

A more durable basis for policy coordination is provided by yet another MoU between the two countries on policy dialogue between the two governments and interaction between their think tanks. Another important commitment which has been reiterated during the latest visit is with regard to the annual summit meetings of the leaders, which could henceforth be scheduled on the margins of a multilateral event.

#### MARITIME COOPERATION

Owing to their geo-strategic location, India and Indonesia share common concerns in the Indo-Pacific region. The Indonesian President declared the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF), or what has been termed as Joko Widodo's 'maritime axis doctrine' at the Ninth East Asia Summit in Naypyidaw, Myanmar on 13 November 2014, in which he presented the five pillars of the concept. Indonesia's geographical location means that it is 'gatekeeper of the two oceans' and commands the major sea lanes—the Straits of Malacca, the Sunda Strait, the Lombok Strait and the Ombai-We-tar Strait. Maritime cooperation was an important issue in the discussions that took place during President Widodo's India visit in 2016. A separate Joint Statement on Maritime Cooperation was issued on 12 December 2016 in which it was mentioned that the two countries had similar perceptions of the regional and global maritime environment.

Indonesia issued a new official map on 14 July 2017 in which it renamed the waters northeast of the Natuna Islands bordering the South China Sea as the 'Laut Natuna Utara' the 'North Natuna Sea'. It invoked the July 16 Arbitration Court ruling for the extension of its exclusive

economic zone (EEZ).<sup>7</sup> The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) criticised Indonesia's action, which was seen as seeking a bargaining chip before engaging in bilateral maritime boundary delimitation talks sometime in the future.

India and Indonesia have been past Chairs of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and played active roles in building a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indian Ocean region.

The two leaders welcomed the adoption of the 'Shared Vision on Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific between India and Indonesia'.<sup>8</sup> In the operative paragraphs, it includes reference to: enhancing trade and investment cooperation; promoting sustainable development of marine resources; expanding cooperation in disaster risk management; fostering tourism and cultural exchanges; promoting maritime safety and security; and strengthening academic, science and technology cooperation. More significant perhaps is the access that India has obtained to Indonesia's Sabang port, which lies at the mouth of Malacca Strait and is deep enough for submarines as well.<sup>9</sup>

There is immense potential for creating synergies between India's Act East Policy and PM Modi's vision of 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) on the one hand, and President Joko Widodo's 'Global Maritime Fulcrum Policy', on the other.

A 2016 Eminent Persons' Group Report<sup>10</sup> captures the growing defence understanding between India and Indonesia, especially in the maritime domain when it states:

There is considerable compatibility between India's Act East Policy and the New Indian Ocean Policy, and Indonesia's Maritime Fulcrum Policy. Our countries should promote maritime cooperation in defense and security, infrastructure, fisheries, and the Blue Economy as a whole. The two countries can work together to ensure peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific—an area of great strategic significance to both.

As Indonesia's Ambassador to India Sidhartha Reza Suryodipuro pointed out in a Conference in Bhubaneswar:

We also want to strengthen international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and regional rules and norms in the waters that we share, namely between Sumatera and the Bay of Bengal. Currently our two governments are actively considering the determination of our EEZ boundaries.<sup>11</sup>

The 2016 EPG Report mentions:

1. China's Maritime Silk Route (MSR) and One Belt One Road (OBOR) and the expanding Chinese influence in the neighbourhood and Indian Ocean littoral.
2. The adverse implications of China's incursions into Indonesian waters off the Natuna islands.
3. The maritime orientation of the two countries, depending on security of SLOCs.
4. Cooperation through the India-Indonesia CORPAT, combined exercises, visits of naval ships, visits by service-to-service staff talk and need for developing maritime infrastructure/security capability and maritime diplomacy and undertake joint development in the defence industry in the maritime sector.
5. Need for concluding a 'White Shipping Agreement'.
6. Counter-terror cooperation and learning from each other's experience.
7. Close cooperation/exchanges between the two militaries.
8. Exchange information and best practices in disaster management.

#### ENERGY COOPERATION

An important move forward has been the willingness to progress from dependence on hydrocarbons and fossil fuels to renewable energy, and more energy efficient new and renewable energy technologies to ensure energy security. Tucked away in Para 45 of the India-Indonesia Joint Statement issued during the visit of Prime Minister to Indonesia is a pointer of utmost significance:

'Both Leaders welcomed potential cooperation in the area of peaceful use of nuclear energy and looked forward to the early renewal of an Agreement on Cooperation regarding the Utilization of Nuclear Energy for Peaceful Purposes.'<sup>12</sup>

#### POSITIVE OUTLOOK

After a long hiatus, the India-Indonesia relationship seems to be headed in a direction where the immense potential may begin to be realised. The growing convergence in the maritime sphere has been bolstered by the growing understanding in the other spheres and interaction at the highest levels, which culminated in the recent visit of the Indian PM to Indonesia.

## NOTES

1. Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto, 'India-RI: Indo-Pacific Strategic Partners', *Jakarta Post*, 30 May 2018, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/05/30/india-ri-indo-pacific-strategic-partners.html>, accessed on 20 June 2018.
2. Ibid.
3. Donald E. Weatherbee, 'Understanding Jokowi's Foreign Policy', *Trends in Southeast Asia*, No. 12, 2016, Singapore, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, available at [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/TRS12\\_16.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/TRS12_16.pdf), accessed on 20 May 2018.
4. See 'India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (IND-INDO CORPAT)', available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=179826>, accessed on 20 June 2018.
5. The Indian Navy has, in the past, assisted other Indian Ocean countries with EEZ surveillance, search and rescue (SAR), humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR), and other capacity-building and capability-enhancing activities.
6. Supriyanto, 'India-RI: Indo-Pacific Strategic Partners', n. 1.
7. Indonesia made it clear, however, that it had not renamed the entire South China Sea, only the part that falls within its EEZ (which incidentally also overlaps with China's Nine-Dash Line). See Aaron Connelly, 'Indonesia's New North Natuna Sea: What's in a Name?', *The Interpreter*, 19 July 2017, available at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/indonesia-s-new-north-natuna-sea-what-s-name>, accessed on 19 May 2018.
9. See 'Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific', on the MEA web-site at <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29933/Shared+Vision+of+IndiaIndonesia+Maritime+Cooperation+in+the+IndoPacific>, accessed on 20 June 2018.
9. India already has access to two other ports: Duqm in Oman, and Chahbahar in Iran. A third-Assumption Island in Seychelles could also become accessible if Indian efforts eventually succeed. See 'India's Coastline Now "Extends" from Seychelles to Indonesia'. *The Times of India*, 1 June 2018, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/indias-coastline-now-extends-from-seychelles-to-indonesia/articleshow/64411489.cms>, accessed on 20 June 2018. Also see Suhasini Haider, 'India's Proposed Assumption Island Deal Drifts', *The Hindu*, 16 June 2018, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indias-proposed-assumption-island-deal-drifts/article24182507.ece>, accessed on 20 June 2018.
10. This Report was submitted to Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Indian PM Narendra Modi when they met in New Delhi in December 2016.



11. The Indonesian Ambassador made these comments at 'Purbasa: East Meets East', International Conference organised by Kalinga International Foundation, 16-18 March 2018 at Bhubaneswar, Odisha.
12. 'India-Indonesia Joint Statement During Visit of Prime Minister to Indonesia (May 30, 2018)', at <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29932/indiaindonesia+joint+statement+during+visit+of+p+rime+minister+to+indonesia+may+30+2018>, accessed on 20 June 2018.