

Missing the Mark: The U.S.-Indonesia Relationship



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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 21-02-2021		2. REPORT TYPE FINAL		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) N/A	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Missing the Mark: The U.S.-Indonesia Relationship				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A	
6. AUTHOR(S) James David Hostetler, CDR, USN				5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A	
				5e. TASK NUMBER N/A	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Writing & Teaching Excellence Center Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) N/A	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) N/A	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the curriculum. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT New forms of alignment in international relations emerged in the late 20th century, forging new comprehensive and strategic partnerships among countries, namely the U.S.-Indonesia Strategic Partnership. An analysis of strategic partnerships and military alliances in the Indo-Pacific region reveals the United States and Indonesia have missed the mark by not expanding their partnership to form a bilateral military alliance, and have missed an opportunity to counter China's hegemonic aspirations in the South China Sea. Strategic partnerships are established based on shared goals between countries and are not formed to balance power against a regional threat. Conversely, alliances form to achieve balance against a perceived threat and are shown to deter major conflict. However, these terms are incorrectly combined in strategy and policy documents to achieve deterrent effects. This combination prevents alliance formation and courting of Indonesia based on a shared ideology with U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, commitment to a rules-based international order, and geo-strategic position. This missed opportunity has resulted in a continued imbalance of power against a growing threat in the region, which China exploits through the expansion of island-building operations in the South China Sea.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS (Key words) China, Indonesia, Alliance, Partnership, Deterrence, Strategy					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT N/A	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Director, Writing Center
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 401-841-6499

INTRODUCTION

In the late 20th century, relations with non-allied countries shifted away from traditional military *alliances* to new forms of alignment (security cooperation, coalitions, and strategic *partnerships*), fueled by a perceived absence of global power to challenge the U.S.-led international order.¹ However, new actors and threats have emerged in the global environment, particularly with China leveraging all national power elements to subvert regional stability, threaten Indo-Pacific nations' sovereignty, and challenge the current internal rules-based order.² The reemergence of great power competition has not coincided with the reemergence of alliances. Should international relations policies revert to traditional forms of alignment?

One specific alignment, the U.S.-Indonesia Strategic Partnership, is designed to enable collaboration on “issues of regional and global significance,”³ but has not deterred China's regional territorial violations in the North Natuna Sea. Through an analysis of strategic partnerships and military alliances in the Indo-Pacific region, Indonesia and the United States have missed the mark by not expanding their partnership to form a bilateral military alliance, and missed an opportunity to counter China's excessive claims in the South China Sea (SCS). First, the strategic partnership between the United States and Indonesia, by design, will not counter Chinese activity in the region. Alliances are threat-driven to deter, while strategic partnerships are not. General deterrence goals have not materialized due to the misapplication of alignment terms in strategy documents. Second, conditional deterrent alliances, formed through mutual defense treaties, balance conventional military power to deter violent conflict and enhance

¹ Bruno Tertrais, “The Changing Nature of Military Alliances,” *The Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2004): 136; Thomas S. Wilkins, “‘Alignment’, Not ‘alliance’ – the Shifting Paradigm of International Security Cooperation: Toward a Conceptual Taxonomy of Alignment,” *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 1 (2012): 54. An alliance is an official agreement between two or more governments for the mutual defense of each, such that an armed attack on one is viewed as an armed attack on all. A partnership is a less formal agreement, with no formal mandate for mutual self-defense.

² U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 8; Phillip Davidson, “China's Challenge to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific,” (speech, Harvard Kennedy School, MA, October 1, 2019).

³ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *U.S. Relations with Indonesia: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet, January 21, 2020* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2020).

regional stability. Strategic partnerships are valuable to enhance cooperation and dialogue and balance ideology but do not infer military power balance. Lastly, conditions exist for a U.S.-Indonesia alliance due to Indonesia's geo-strategic position, alignment with the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, and commitment to a rules-based international order.

ALIGNMENT – ALLIANCES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Following World War II, significant threats to the new international order (the Soviet Union, communism, and the rise of the nuclear age) led to the formation of military alliances in effect today.⁴ These alliances were formed to balance military power in favor of the United States and her allies.⁵ Today, the United States remains a party to five bilateral alliances in the Indo-Pacific formed during the Cold War against a different threat. The most recent alliance formed dates to January 19, 1960, when the United States signed a mutual defense treaty with Japan.⁶ The end of the Cold War, combined with the emergence of international terrorism and non-state actors threatening international stability, transformed international relations policies. As a result, historical alignments of alliances and coalitions are now joined by security communities and strategic partnerships.⁷ Partnerships allow for collaboration between countries in multiple areas, including economic development, humanitarian assistance, medical cooperation, information sharing, and defense cooperation. In the Indo-Pacific today, the United States has comprehensive and strategic partnerships with eight nations (Singapore, New Zealand, Mongolia, India, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Indonesia), five of which have developed and

⁴ Tertrais, "The Changing Nature of Military Alliances," 135-149; U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, "Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 1949," U.S. Department of State, accessed September 4, 2020.

⁵ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 5-6, 33.

⁶ *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the United States of America*, January 19, 1960, 11 U.S.T. 1632 T.I.A.S. 4509.

⁷ Wilkins, "'Alignment', Not 'alliance'," 65-69.

expanded since China's "peaceful rise."⁸ Despite the array of advantages to strategic partnerships in international relations, partnerships are less formal and binding than an alliance and is not formed in opposition to a nation state threat.⁹

Indonesia is the third-largest democracy, the seventh-largest economy, holds a leadership role in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and occupies a key strategic position on the borders of the Strait of Malacca and SCS, where roughly 80 percent of China's oil imports transit annually.¹⁰ Indonesia has experienced frequent Chinese incursions into their Economic Exclusion Zone (EEZ), clashing militarily with Chinese fishing vessels challenging Indonesia's sovereignty in the North Natuna Sea. Chinese incursions continue, despite Indonesia possessing a robust strategic partnership with the United States.¹¹ Additionally, Indonesia has established they possess the political will to counter Chinese civil-military activity in the SCS, though remaining neutral to disputed claims in the SCS, but lack the military power to do so.¹²

PARTNERSHIP FOR COOPERATION

Strategic partnerships between countries are not deterrent mechanisms. Therefore, the current U.S.-Indonesia Strategic Partnership does not deter Chinese malign activity in the Indo-Pacific region. In May of 2018, senior Indonesian and U.S. officials and regional experts met for

⁸ Zheng Bijian, "China's 'Peaceful Rise' to Great-Power Status," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (Sep.-Oct., 2005): 20. Bijan asserts that "China's emergence thus far has been driven by capital, technology, and resources acquired through peaceful means."

⁹ Prashanth Parameswaran, "Explaining US Strategic Partnerships in the Asia-Pacific Region: Origins, Developments and Prospects," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 36, no. 2 (08, 2014): 264-265.

¹⁰ Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), China Power Project, "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?" (CSIS, 2020), Accessed September 6, 2020; Brian Harding and Andreyka Natalegawa, *Enhancing the U.S.-Indonesia Strategic Partnership* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 2018), 2; Department of State, *U.S. Relations with Indonesia*.

¹¹ Tama Salim, "RI flexes muscle, sinks Chinese boat, a big one," *The Jakarta Post*, May 20, 2015; Xin Zhang, "Indonesia Told to Release 75 Chinese Fishermen," *China Daily*, June 26, 2009.

¹² Emanuele Scimia, "Indonesia Needs to Upgrade US Alliance to Fend off Chinese Aggression," *Nikkei Asian Review* (Nikkei Asian Review, July 25, 2020); Patrick M. Cronin and Marvin C. Ott, "Deepening the US-Indonesian Strategic Partnership," *The Diplomat* (TheDiplomat.com, February 17, 2018).

a strategic dialogue on U.S.-Indonesia relations, concluding that the strategic partnership is not meeting its potential.¹³ The dialogue focused on regional trends, political engagement, economics and trade, and defense cooperation; deterrence is not mentioned in the summary report.¹⁴ Research concludes “strategic partnerships are designed to address common challenges and exploit opportunities between countries,”¹⁵ understood as “primarily ‘goal-driven’ rather than ‘threat-driven’ arrangements.”¹⁶ DoD classifies partnerships as “less formal than alliances,” which foster mutually-beneficial relationships without the requirement of a treaty.¹⁷ The strategic dialogue correctly framed the partnership through cooperation, associating the method of alignment (strategic partnership) with clear achievable goals for partnerships (political, economic, and defense cooperation). This approach is not consistent across policy and strategy discussions.

The *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* (NDS) states: “We will strengthen and evolve our alliances and partnerships into an extended network capable of deterring or decisively acting to meet the shared challenges of our time.”¹⁸ This example conflates alignment terminology (alliances *and* partnerships) to achieve a strategic goal (network capable of deterring). There are five other instances in the NDS which link alliances *and* partnerships with deterrence, and this linkage also pervades official communications prepared by U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM).¹⁹ The combining of terms is not limited to the United States and also permeates research by prominent think tanks. For instance, in a 2011 RAND Europe research report supported by the French Ministry of Defense, the author, attempting to clarify

¹³ Harding and Natalegawa, *Enhancing the U.S.-Indonesia Strategic Partnership*, 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-9.

¹⁵ Parameswaran, “Explaining US Strategic Partnerships,” 265.

¹⁶ Wilkins, “‘Alignment’, Not ‘alliance’,” 68.

¹⁷ Claudette Roulo, “Alliances vs. Partnerships,” *Defense.gov*, March 22, 2019.

¹⁸ Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 8.

¹⁹ “Speeches/Testimony,” U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, accessed August 22, 2020. Testimony and speeches prepared for the Commander, USINDOPACOM frequently cite language from the NDS linking alliances and partnerships to deterrence.

distinctions between alliances and partnerships, stated: “historical alliances are enduring partnerships.”²⁰ An important distinction is required in the relationship between alliances and partnerships. Mutual Defense Treaties, used to establish alliances, do not cover all aspects of cooperation between two or more countries. Additional cooperation, such as economic and humanitarian cooperation, would be covered in a partnership agreement; therefore, allies can also be part of a partnership. The lack of distinction between strategic partnerships and alliances prevents clarity in the discourse on policy and strategy effects.

The benefits of strategic partnerships on diplomatic and military cooperation are well documented, ranging from economic growth, military interoperability, information sharing, and regional security.²¹ However, cooperation is not inherently deterrence. Cooperation does not infer commitment of military power and therefore does not alter the balance of power. In 2013, Indonesia and China entered a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, focusing on economic development, youth exchanges, education, and trade.²² In 2018, both countries held a joint seminar to commemorate the five-year anniversary of their partnership, adding security cooperation and defense to the three-day seminar agenda.²³ However, despite China’s strategic partnership with Indonesia, the United States is not deterred.

Strategic partnerships are not deterrent mechanisms. The conflation of strategic partnerships with deterrence in U.S. strategic documents clouds the evolution of alignment

²⁰ Jeremy Ghez, *Alliances in the 21st Century: Implications for the US-European Partnership* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), vii.

²¹ Cronin and Ott, “Deepening the US-Indonesian Strategic Partnership.”; Harding and Natalegawa, *Enhancing the U.S.–Indonesia Strategic Partnership*, 1-7; Hiep Le Hong, “The Vietnam-US Security Partnership and the Rules-based International Order in the Age of Trump.” *Trends in Southeast Asia*, no. 1 (2020), (ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2020): 4; Kathleen J. McNinis, “The Competitive Advantages and Risks of Alliances.” *2020 Index of Military Strength: With Essays on Great Power Competition*, ed. by Dakota L. Wood, (Washington DC: Heritage Foundation, October 31, 2019): 85-87.

²² People’s Republic of China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Joint Statement on Strengthening Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the People's Republic of China and The Republic of Indonesia, March 26, 2015*, (Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).

²³ People’s Republic of China, Embassy in Republic of Indonesia, “Ambassador Xiao Qian Addresses Seminar on 2018/12/04,” December 4, 2018.

between partners. Specifically, it prevents critical dialogue to transform the U.S.-Indonesia alignment from a partnership into an alliance that would achieve deterrent effects. The amalgamation and misuse of alignment terms in U.S. strategy documents have created faulty assumptions and expectations for relationships, and a disparity between stated ends, ways, and means, which create significant implications on policy and strategy implementation.²⁴ A significant implication is the absence of a U.S.-Indonesia military alliance.

ALLIANCE FOR DETERRENCE

Alliances increase regional stability and promote a “free and open Indo-Pacific”²⁵ within the U.S. “hub-and-spoke”²⁶ system, facilitating new relationships among alliance members to pursue common goals such as regional stability in the region.²⁷ U.S. strategy and official communication focus deterrence of potential adversaries but merge alignment terminology and confuse the formulation of a clear ends, ways, and means strategy. Deterrence is not achieved through partnerships; deterrence is achieved through alliances, which have elicited responses from China despite the last new alliance being formed in 1960. Official statements originating from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) government highlight China’s opposition to the U.S. alliance system, viewed by Chinese officials as an impediment to regional security, as alliances limit China’s ability to sow dissension between the United States and regional countries.²⁸

²⁴ Wilkins, "'Alignment', Not 'alliance'," 75.

²⁵ U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*, November 4, 2019, 4.

²⁶ McInnis, “Competitive Advantages and Risks,” 79. McInnis uses “hub-and-spoke” to describe bilateral U.S. alliances in Asia, with the U.S. as the hub.

²⁷ Thomas S. Wilkins, "From Strategic Partnership to Strategic Alliance?: Australia-Japan Security Ties and the Asia-Pacific." *Asia Policy*, no. 20 (2015): 110-111.

²⁸ Wilkins, "From Strategic Partnership to Strategic Alliance?" 103; Adam P. Liff, "China and the US Alliance System," *The China Quarterly* 233, (2018): 138.

Historically, alliances have deterred adversary action against treaty members such that since 1940, no conflict has occurred which has threatened a U.S. treaty ally's existence.²⁹ The deterrent effect of alliances, and more specifically, conditional deterrent alliances, has been studied extensively and support theories of alliance influence on general deterrence, finding empirical support for deterrence of potential adversaries through defensive alliances.³⁰ Most recently, a study of 319 alliances from 1816-2000 concluded only conditional deterrent alliances, as opposed to compellent or unconditional alliances, deter conflict between major powers.³¹ All of the current U.S. alliances, both bilateral and multi-lateral, are conditional deterrent alliances. NATO is a conditional deterrent alliance which stipulates mutual defense if Article V is enacted; remaining U.S. alliances have similar articles and language specifying conditions for military assistance. These alliances "balance threatening power," acting as an underlying deterrent to military action by regional adversaries.³²

Discussions on alliances center the idea of balancing against a common adversary.³³ Holmes and Yoshihara's analysis of gray-zone activity in the Indo-Pacific regions asserts, "it is crucial to acknowledge that [...] no one can deter every instance of mischief in the gray zone."³⁴ Balance, in this sense, is the ability to obtain a favorable balance of conventional military power to deter China, as "China's conventional military power lies at the root of its gray-zone

²⁹ One could point to the Arab-Israeli conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s as evidence of adversaries threatening the existence of Israel. However, one must caution against the conflation of alignment terminology. The United States and Israel were not party to an alliance, but a security cooperation arrangement. Michael Makovsky and Charles Wald. "The US and Israel Should Agree on a Mutual Defense Pact." *The Jerusalem Post*, December 16, 2019.

³⁰ Brett Ashley Leeds, "Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes," *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 3 (2003): 437.

³¹ Brett V. Benson, "Unpacking Alliances: Deterrent and Compellent Alliances and Their Relationship with Conflict, 1816 – 2000," *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 4 (October 2011): 1117, 1126.

³² Patrick M. Cronin, "Challenges for US Alliance Management in the Western Pacific," *Security Challenges* 2, no. 3 (2006): 11.

³³ Walt, "Alliance Formation," 5.

³⁴ James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "Deterring China in the "Gray Zone": Lessons of the South China Sea for U.S. Alliances," *Orbis* 61, no. 3 (2017): 325.

strategy.”³⁵ China’s malign activity in the South and East China Seas, specifically regarding actions on the Senkaku Islands and Scarborough Shoal, raise questions concerning the efficacy of alliances in the Indo-Pacific with Japan and the Philippines. If alliances deter, should China’s gray-zone tactics in the maritime be deterred against the Philippines and Japan? It is important to note that no armed attacks have occurred against the Philippines or Japan by China to date. The seizure of Scarborough Shoal and malign activity around the Senkaku Islands is not an armed attack against a treaty ally. Therefore, these actions cannot be deterred solely by an alliance’s existence, but by an alliance’s strength. Our strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific are not factors in the equation of conventional military power balance against China - partnerships are driven by opportunity, while alliances are driven by threats. Though the U.S.-Indonesia strategic partnership will continue to promote cooperation and regional security, it will not affect the balance of power against China.

ACHIEVING A FAVORABLE BALANCE

Alliance formation theory centers on the argument that nations form alliances to achieve balance against perceived threats, to combine resources, and to convey a united message to adversaries that their agendas cannot be pursued unchallenged.³⁶ Walt’s balance of threat concept theorizes several conditions that determine a perceived threat and the probability to balance: geographic proximity, aggregate power, offensive potential, and aggressiveness.³⁷ China’s close proximity is evident and becomes more prominent based on a growing Navy with blue-water ambitions, increasing combat capabilities and potential, and continued aggressiveness in the North Natuna Sea. Indonesia’s geo-strategic position relative to China, alignment with

³⁵ Ibid., 339.

³⁶ McInnis, “The Competitive Advantages and Risks of Alliances,” 88; Walt, “Alliance Formation,” 5.

³⁷ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987): 22.

U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, and commitment to a rules-based international order are essential elements to alliance formation and balancing in the Pacific.

The balance of power against China is complex, and China's continued efforts to implement a *deterrence by denial* strategy through increasing military capabilities, economic dependence, diplomacy, and controlled access in the SCS increase China's perceived threat to Asian nations.³⁸ In addition to island-building and attempts to control maritime activity in the South China Sea, China increased fishing and Coast Guard activity in Indonesia's EEZ beginning in 2009, and continue to exploit resources into 2020.³⁹ China has been increasing their aggressiveness towards Indonesia in the North Natuna Sea, and has been aggregating combat potential in the SCS to dictate maritime control on their terms. Indonesia's geo-strategic position is a central element in China's "Malacca Dilemma,"⁴⁰ presenting a formidable threat to Chinese expansion and economic security, with the potential to isolate China in the Pacific. Jakarta occupies a strategic position in the region, which could enable Indonesia to employ a *deterrence by punishment* strategy economically to keep Chinese expansion at bay; however, they lack the balance of military power required to enforce it.⁴¹ Cronin and Ott summarize the need for a favorable balance of power: "if Indonesia is to successfully defend its own (and broader Southeast Asian regional) maritime interests, it will surely require substantial American

³⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020: Annual Report to Congress*, (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020); Michael J. Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018): 2. A deterrence by denial strategy aims to deter action by creating conditions that are unfavorable to a potential adversary and reduce the likelihood of their success.

³⁹ Ian J. Storey, "What can Indonesia do in its Stand-Off with China Over the Natunas?" *The Straits Times*, January 10, 2020; Prashanth Parameswaran, "Deterrence and South China Sea Strategy: What Do the Latest China-Indonesia Natuna Tensions Tell Us?" *The Diplomat*, January 8, 2020.

⁴⁰ Marc Lanteigne, "China's Maritime Security and the 'Malacca Dilemma'," *Asian Security* 4, no. 2 (2008): 143-144.

⁴¹ Michael J. Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018): 2. "Deterrence by punishment [...] threatens severe penalties, such as nuclear escalation or severe economic sanctions, if an attack occurs. These penalties are connected to the local fight and the wider world. The focus of deterrence by punishment is not the direct defense of the contested commitment but rather threats of wider punishment that would raise the cost of an attack."

support.”⁴² Nevertheless, Indonesia prefers the status quo, with the United States largely shouldering the responsibility to balance China.⁴³ Jakarta’s belief that the United States will balance China, and a U.S. focus on strategic partnerships, prevents both from realizing the deterrent effects of an alliance and the benefits to regional security.

U.S.-Indonesia relationship studies focus on a need to enhance and expand the current strategic partnership to cooperate on developing regional security matters, especially in military cooperation, but fall short of recommending an alliance.⁴⁴ This is a missed opportunity. Indonesia is more aligned with the United States on regional security issues than they appear, and though ideology plays a subordinate role to perceived threat, similar ideologies are significant in alliance formation.⁴⁵ Furthermore, alliance theory indicates that positions of neutrality against threats increase the chance of dispute initiation.⁴⁶ Although Indonesia communicated they do not want to choose sides, failure to choose is a choice and may invite increased malign activity by China. Despite Indonesia’s preference for the status quo, they have demonstrated they possess the political will and requirement to counter Chinese activity, as evident in 2009, 2015, and 2020.⁴⁷ However, Indonesia lacks the military strength to deter China alone, and their current approach has not been successful. The lack of an alliance between Indonesia and the United States, and the benefits of combining military resources to respond to aggression, prevents implementing a deterrence by denial strategy against China. Drawing from alliance comparisons from the Cold War, the United States is an ideal ally for Indonesia. The United States is “sufficiently powerful to contribute substantially to their defense, it is driven by

⁴² Cronin and Ott, “Deepening the US-Indonesian Strategic Partnership.”

⁴³ Scimia, “Indonesia Needs to Upgrade US Alliance.”

⁴⁴ Cronin and Ott, “Deepening the US-Indonesian Strategic Partnership”; Harding and Natalegawa, *Enhancing the U.S.-Indonesia Strategic Partnership*; Scimia, “Indonesia Needs to Upgrade US Alliance.”

⁴⁵ Walt, “Alliance Formation,” 26.

⁴⁶ Leeds, “Do Alliances Deter Aggression?” 437.

⁴⁷ Salim, “RI flexes muscle.”; Zhang, “Indonesia Told to Release 75 Chinese Fishermen.” Seventy-five Chinese fisherman were detained during the 2009 seizure of Gui Xei Yu 12661, and further released due to pressure from China.

its own concerns to oppose [Chinese] expansion, and yet it is sufficiently distant from [Indonesia] so that it does not itself pose a significant threat.”⁴⁸

ISSUES IN ALIGNMENT

There are many challenges in alliance formation and management, specifically country willingness, entanglement, disparate burden sharing, and exhaustion from country overreach. Alliances are not *fait accompli* structures based on ideology and threats; each country gets a vote. Regional studies on Indonesia, combined with official statements, suggest Indonesia does not want to pick a side and is concerned with U.S. commitment.⁴⁹ Indonesia has historically operated from a position of neutrality regarding maritime disputes, but recently emerged as a strong voice against violations of international law at sea, focusing on the “legal basis of China’s nine-dash line”⁵⁰ and China’s incursions into the North Natuna Sea. Dr. Ian Storey, an expert in Southeast Asia affairs, contends “Indonesia’s longstanding position that it is a neutral party in the South China Sea dispute has always been a convenient fiction. It is designed to prevent the issue from becoming a major source of tensions in bilateral relations [with China].”⁵¹ Indonesia’s public condemnation of China’s maritime claims at international tribunals and letters to the U.N., combined with military action against Chinese fishing vessels operating in the North Natuna Sea suggest Indonesia is on the side of a rules-based international system and a free and open Indo-Pacific.⁵² Additionally, increased defense cooperation and foreign military sales between Indonesia and the United States indicate a greater realization of alignment between the countries

⁴⁸ Walt, “Alliance Formation,” 36.

⁴⁹ Harding and Natalegawa, *Enhancing the U.S.–Indonesia Strategic Partnership*, 2.

⁵⁰ Ian Storey, “The South China Sea Dispute in 2020-2021,” *ISEAS Perspective* no. 97 (2020), 2.

⁵¹ Storey, “What can Indonesia do?”

⁵² Storey, “What can Indonesia do?”; Parameswaran, “Deterrence and South China Sea Strategy.”; Prashanth Parameswaran, “Why Did Indonesia Just Sink a Vessel From China?: A brief look behind a significant development,” *The Diplomat*, May 22, 2015.

on security concerns. Scimia reports: “the idea of expanding military ties with the United States finds support from some in the Indonesian military's senior ranks [...] and believe such a cooperation needs to be taken to a higher level, similar to an alliance, to make sure China will not dictate its policy in the region.”⁵³ Perceptions of commitment ebb and flow by administrations of both countries. The pivot to the Pacific, strengthening of the U.S.-Indonesia strategic partnership in 2015, and the priority shift to Asia in the 2018 NDS indicate a positive trend in U.S. commitment to the region. Additionally, there can be no greater display of commitment to a regional country than discussion of a mutual defense alliance.

Research on the efficacy of alliances highlights a concern for entanglement in foreign conflicts and disparate burden-sharing, which counter any perceived gains from alliance formation.⁵⁴ U.S. alliances are built on conditional deterrence, bound by treaty to respond to an attack on allies. However, there is concern that alliances can involve the United States in conflicts they would have not entered if an alliance did not exist. To limit entanglement, the United States would inherently need to abandon an alliance in time of need, which risks U.S. legitimacy, opens alliances to adversaries, and reduces treaties to frivolous policy.⁵⁵ The United States has an enormous responsibility as a global power to not only defend her interests, but of those who cannot defend themselves. This is as true today as it was in 1945, where, hours before his death, Franklin Delano Roosevelt penned: “Today we have learned in the agony of war that great power involves great responsibility.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Scimia, “Indonesia Needs to Upgrade US Alliance.”

⁵⁴ McInnis, “Competitive Advantages and Risks,” 84-85; Scott Lawless, “American Grand Strategy for an Emerging World Order.” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (2020): 131-132, doi: 10.2307/26915280.

⁵⁵ Martin Murphy, “The Importance of Alliances for U.S. Security.” *2017 Index of Military Strength: Assessing America’s Ability to Provide for the Common Defense*, ed. by Dakota L. Wood. (Washington DC: Heritage Foundation October 7, 2016): 26.

⁵⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Franklin D. Roosevelt's Last Message to the American People*, (1945).

U.S. overreach and exhaustion due to multiple alliances and commitments, which could promote regional instability if the U.S. cannot honor commitments, is a growing concern.⁵⁷ Over-reach and exhaustion (linked to burden-sharing) are tempered by alliances, where a pool of resources across alliance members becomes available for employment. The United States and Indonesia will continue to operate in the region to protect their national interests. The absence of an alliance calls for “either the maintenance of a huge U.S. military presence overseas [...] or the holding of substantial forces in readiness at home.”⁵⁸ Likewise, burden-sharing cannot be reduced simplistically to cash value; “when nations pool resources and share responsibility for [...] common defense, [...] the] security burden becomes lighter and more cost-effective”⁵⁹ such that the financial costs for the United States would be considerably higher absent an alliance.⁶⁰

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The United States and Indonesia have missed an opportunity to counter Chinese aspirations by not forming a military alliance. Both nations have the means to achieve general deterrence against a regional adversary that challenges an international rules-based order but have not developed the appropriate ways to use them. The United States has the means to project power far from its shores to the Indo-Pacific region to cooperate with regional countries and enhance stability. Indonesia possesses limited military resources to defend her sovereignty and strategic position but lacks a power projection capability against adversaries. Together, the United States and Indonesia have not implemented a combined strategy to apply these means against a common end state of deterring China. This dilemma arises from the frequent

⁵⁷ Lawless, "American Grand Strategy," 138.

⁵⁸ Murphy, "The Importance of Alliances," 26-27.

⁵⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019. (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2019), 21.

⁶⁰ McInnis, "Competitive Advantages and Risks," 86.

misapplication of alignment terms to describe the relationship between Indonesia and the United States, an error that clouds discussion on U.S. commitment, similar ideologies, and advantages and disadvantages of both alliances and strategic partnerships. Strategic partnerships improve the cooperation between nations and enhance capabilities, but they do not deter adversaries and do not balance military power. Alliances enhance regional security, communicate commitment, and balance military power against an agreed upon threat. Therefore, the United States and Indonesia should transition to an alliance based on Indonesia's actions towards China in the North Natuna Sea, their geo-strategic position in the region, and shared ideology of regional security goals. Failing to ally has resulted in a continued imbalance of power against a growing threat in the region, which China exploits through the expansion of island-building operations in the SCS.

To remedy the misapplication of alignment terms, and provide a course for policy and strategy development, the following actions are recommended. First, the U.S. government should cease combining alliances *and* strategic partnerships *with* deterrence in strategy documents and official statements. Interoperability and maritime security operations with strategic partners are critical to regional security, but partnerships do not infer mutual defense or alter military power balance. By separating partnerships from deterrence, a clear distinction from alliances becomes evident when formulating strategy and policy recommendations. Second, CDRUSINDOPACOM should consider recommending policy to pursue an alliance with Indonesia, through the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to the National Security Council. While distinct lines between policy formulation (civilian) and policy execution (uniformed services) are understood, policy recommendations based on military strategy goals by senior military advisors to the National Security Council are necessary. Lastly, USINDOPACOM should invite Indonesia to conduct Freedom of Navigation exercises in the SCS and offer U.S. assets for maritime

security operations with Indonesia in the North Natuna Sea. Both operations should include mission-specific rules of engagement (ROE) to permit collective self-defense of Indonesian vessels. These operations, combined with modified ROE, highlight U.S. commitment to the region and Indonesian interests and provide a mechanism to facilitate discussion on mutual defense.

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