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Limited “Strategic Assertiveness”: The Foreign Policy of the Prabowo Administration and Its Practical Dilemmas

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of continuously deepening great power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific and the accelerating fragmentation of the international order, Indonesia’s Prabowo Subianto administration has implemented a foreign policy of “strategic assertiveness” since taking office. This refers to a diplomatic posture that, while strictly adhering to the “independent and active” principle, seeks to substantively elevate Indonesia’s strategic autonomy through hands-on, high-level diplomacy, the establishment of diversified defense partnerships, and the active pioneering of global multilateral agendas. However, “strategic assertiveness” has not directly translated into a corresponding enhancement of diplomatic capacity, and the advancement of its policies faces multiple constraints in practice. Building on this, this article employs the level-of-analysis approach to systematically examine the practical dilemmas of the Prabowo administration’s strategically assertive foreign policy from both systemic and domestic dimensions. At the systemic level, factors such as the intensification of Sino-US strategic competition, the paradox of multilateral participation, and intra-ASEAN positional fragmentation continuously compress Indonesia’s strategic buffer space. At the domestic level, elements including the economy-first logic, insufficient state capacity, nationalist sentiments, and multiple identity constructions further restrict the execution space and effectiveness of its foreign policy. The study finds that while the Prabowo administration’s foreign policy has become more proactive in posture, it remains subject to structural constraints from various factors at both the systemic and domestic levels in practice. The extent of its “strategic assertiveness” is limited and struggles to translate into stable and sustainable diplomatic capacity.

Keywords: Indonesian diplomacy; Prabowo administration; Strategic assertiveness; Practical dilemmas; Level-of-analysis approach

1 Introduction

Since the turn of the 21st century, the Indo-Pacific region has gradually emerged as the most intensive geopolitical space for global power competition, and the structural escalation of Sino-US strategic competition has profoundly reshaped the diplomatic environment and strategic choices of regional states. Against this backdrop, how Southeast Asian countries maintain strategic autonomy amidst great power rivalry has become a vital subject in international relations research. As a key actor in Southeast Asia, Indonesia has long adhered to the “independent and active” (bebas aktif) foreign policy principle, and its diplomatic orientation holds significant demonstrative implications for the regional order.

In October 2024, Prabowo Subianto assumed the presidency of Indonesia. His military background and political style have led to widespread expectations that Indonesian diplomacy will adopt a more proactive and autonomous posture compared to that of the Joko Widodo era, a shift characterized by some scholars as “strategic assertiveness.” Since taking office, the Prabowo administration has significantly elevated Indonesia’s international profile through initiatives such as seeking BRICS membership, strengthening defense diplomacy, and engaging in frequent high-level interactions, thereby drawing extensive academic attention. However, this shift in diplomatic posture has not occurred under the conditions of a substantial leap in Indonesia’s national strength or a fundamental alleviation of its domestic structural contradictions. Currently, as Sino-US strategic competition continues to deepen and the regional security landscape becomes increasingly complex and volatile, Indonesia continues to face practical constraints at home, including uneven economic development and prominent livelihood pressures. Within this context, understanding the Prabowo administration’s diplomatic practices solely through its foreign policy ambitions fails to explain its policy oscillation and the practical constraints it confronts on specific issues. Whether its strategically assertive posture can be translated into stable and sustainable diplomatic capacity requires further in-depth analysis.

Building upon existing literature, this article adopts and enriches the concept of “strategic assertiveness” to systematically summarize the characteristics of the Prabowo administration’s foreign policy. Furthermore, incorporating the current state of international society and Indonesia’s domestic realities, this study employs the level-of-analysis approach to analyze the practical dilemmas of the Prabowo administration’s foreign policy. Given the relatively short tenure of the new government and the fact that the long-term outcomes of its foreign policy have yet to fully materialize, this article does not aim to provide a comprehensive evaluation of its foreign policy. Instead, it focuses on analyzing the inherent dilemmas encountered in the formulation and implementation of these policies, thereby addressing the current scarcity of academic research on the practical constraints of Prabowo administration’s diplomacy.

2 Existing Literature and Limitations

As geopolitical competition intensifies in the Indo-Pacific, Indonesia's diplomatic role and strategic choices, as the largest state in Southeast Asia and a key regional actor, have consistently drawn academic attention. Across the existing literature, scholarly discussions on Indonesian diplomacy generally follow two main trajectories: first, analyzing its persistent diplomatic aspirations and expectations for international status; and second, focusing on the policy shifts and the imprint of leadership styles brought about by government transitions.

First, regarding diplomatic aspirations, the academic community has developed a profound understanding of the persistent tension between Indonesia's strategic ambitions and its material capabilities. Zhang (2024) points out that since the Bung Sukarno era, Indonesia has consistently viewed being the leading state in Southeast Asia as a crucial component of its diplomatic imagination. Yue (2025) further conceptualizes Indonesia's foreign strategy as a composite approach centered on economic development, rooted in regional leadership, and operationalized through multidirectional hedging. However, in stark contrast to these grand ambitions is Indonesia's constrained diplomatic execution. Alexandra (2025) explicitly argues that Indonesian diplomacy exhibits a clear "status quo" tendency, where its "activeness" often remains at the level of procedural participation rather than substantive agenda-setting. Teo and Emmers (2025) similarly observe that as a middle power, Indonesia has not fully exerted an intermediary role in the Sino-US-dominated Indo-Pacific competition, confining itself merely to maintaining a balance between the two powers. Yang (2024) notes that Indonesia's capacity to shape the regional order relies heavily on the ASEAN framework—a dependency that often undermines the fulfillment of Indonesia's international commitments and traps it in a "periphery of influence."

Second, regarding government transitions, existing research has summarized the salient shift in Indonesian diplomacy from economic pragmatism during the Joko Widodo era to assertive style under Prabowo. It is widely acknowledged that diplomacy during the Joko Widodo administration was highly subordinate to the domestic economic development agenda. Song and Wang (2018) characterize this as a "national interest-first" pragmatic diplomacy, with the economic dimension at its core. By contrast, following his inauguration, Prabowo has exhibited a significantly more assertive posture than his predecessor. Yadav's research (2025) conceptualizes his policy characteristics as "strategic assertiveness"—a view also shared by Chinese scholars such as Xu (2024), Pan (2024), and Yang (2025), who note that Prabowo is more inclined to pursue his own policy agenda rather than merely continuing his predecessor's projects. This is evidenced by his active promotion of the "Golden Indonesia 2045" vision (Visi Indonesia Emas 2045) and the pursuit of BRICS membership. In terms of evaluation, scholarly assessments of his new diplomatic style generally fall into two camps. One group emphasizes that Prabowo administration's diplomatic strategy strikes a balance between assertiveness and pragmatism,

operating consistently within the “independent and active” framework. For instance, the controversial joint statement with China in November 2024 is interpreted by Putra (2025) as a strategy combining compromise and cooperation based on realistic interest calculations. Conversely, the other group highlights that the Prabowo administration’s foreign policy is heavily influenced by personal factors, potentially introducing geopolitical risks for Indonesia. Iswardhana (2025), for example, emphasizes the impact of President Prabowo’s personal factors on foreign policy decision-making, arguing that diplomatic moves such as joining BRICS lack sufficient domestic policy deliberation. Similarly, scholars like Putra, Akbar and Sumarman (2025) contend that Prabowo’s bolder diplomatic style may expose Indonesia to new challenges concerning its diplomatic stance and geopolitical relations.

In summary, existing literature on diplomacy in the Prabowo era has obvious limitations, most notably characterized by prioritizing intentions over capabilities and emphasizing posture over execution. Although the academic community has comprehensively depicted the assertive turn in the Prabowo administration’s diplomatic posture, it has greatly overlooked the long-standing practical dilemmas inherent in Indonesian diplomacy. Building on this, this article adopts and refines the concept of “strategic assertiveness.” By shifting the analytical lens to the practical level, it systematically examines the internal constraints and execution dilemmas faced by the Prabowo administration in implementing its strategically assertive diplomacy, thereby seeking to bridge this current gap in the literature.

3 The Prabowo Administration’s Foreign Policy: “Strategic Assertiveness”

Since assuming the Indonesian presidency in October 2024, Prabowo administration’s foreign policy has built upon the traditional “independent and active” principle while exhibiting new characteristics, including an increasingly proactive posture, a steadfast sovereignty stance, a heightened focus on defense, and an active pursuit of strategic balance. This series of policy orientations can be collectively conceptualized as “strategic assertiveness.”

From the very beginning of Prabowo’s tenure, his high-agency diplomatic posture captured the close attention of the international academic community, prompting some pioneering literature to introduce the novel concept of “strategic assertiveness” to delineate this transition. For instance, Yadav (2025) observes that while partly maintaining the economic diplomacy characteristic of the Joko era, the new administration has significantly expanded its strategic priorities, placing national security, defense modernization, and global partnerships at the core, thereby arguing that Indonesian diplomacy is shifting toward “strategic assertiveness.” Concurrently, Setiawan (2025) notes that the Prabowo administration’s foreign policy demonstrates a strong political ambition to expand strategic autonomy and global influence, presenting a unique modality that couples an assertive posture with pragmatic engagement. Evidently, “strategic assertiveness” constitutes an illuminating conceptualization derived from vanguard academic observations

of the Prabowo administration's redefinition of Indonesia's international role. Hence, this article adopts and utilizes the concept of "strategic assertiveness" as the primary analytical tool.

Compared to previous administrations, the Prabowo administration's "strategic assertiveness" reveals Indonesia's distinct diplomatic positioning during his tenure. First, in contrast to the Joko administration's highly inward-looking economic pragmatism, which was entirely subordinate to domestic development, the Prabowo administration has broken free from the confines of singular economic interests, elevating defense security and geopolitical influence to an equal strategic standing. Second, unlike the radical confrontational path of the Sukarno era, the "assertiveness" of the Prabowo government is by no means a disruptive ideological confrontation. Indeed, Prabowo himself has repeatedly reaffirmed his commitment to a non-aligned posture on international stages, aiming to take proactive initiatives without breaking the established order. Finally, compared to the mild multilateralism of the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono administration, the Prabowo government places greater emphasis on defending substantive national interests in multilateral forums, reflecting a far more assertive exercise of the state agency.

Based on this, this article defines "strategic assertiveness" as a diplomatic posture that, while strictly adhering to the "independent and active" principle, seeks to substantively elevate Indonesia's strategic autonomy through hands-on, high-level diplomacy, the establishment of diversified defense partnerships, and the active pioneering of global multilateral agendas. In practice, this posture manifests primarily at two levels: First, security diversification and strategic hedging at the great power level. Facing an increasingly complex international rivalry, the Prabowo administration particularly insists on strengthening its hedging strategy within Sino-US relations. In its approach to China, the Prabowo government views it as a critical partner for achieving economic growth targets, while continuing to deepen infrastructure and trade cooperation with China, yet it refuses to yield an inch on sovereignty issues in the North Natuna Sea. In dealing with the United States, while maintaining military procurement and maritime security collaboration, the Prabowo administration also actively expands military and defense ties with countries such as Russia and India—as evidenced by multiple joint exercises in the Java Sea and the Indo-Pacific—seeking to disperse strategic risks by building diversified security dependencies. Second, agenda-setting and Global South expansion at the regional and global levels. Regionally, the Prabowo administration adheres to ASEAN centrality, striving to play a leading role in managing regional rifts on pivotal issues such as the situation in Myanmar and South China Sea disputes. Globally, the Prabowo administration displays a broader horizon than its predecessor, endeavoring to enhance Indonesia's voice in global governance and Global South cooperation through breakthrough initiatives such as announcing its pursuit of BRICS membership.

On the whole, the Prabowo administration's foreign policy exhibits a new orientation of "strategic assertiveness." While this posture fully demonstrates Indonesia's diplomatic ambitions, it simultaneously faces severe practical tests. As a developing middle power, an inherent tension exists between Indonesia's

grand strategic intentions and its relatively limited comprehensive national capabilities, which inevitably causes its foreign policy to encounter multiple constraints when translated into concrete practice.

4 Practical Dilemmas of the Prabowo Administration's Foreign Policy

4.1 The Systemic Level

4.1.1 The Intensification of Great Power Rivalry and the Compression of Indonesia's Strategic Space

Although Prabowo administration's diplomatic posture of "strategic assertiveness" provides, to some extent, a policy foundation for Indonesia to uphold the "independent and active" principle amid great power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, the continuous escalation in the intensity of Sino-US strategic competition is structurally compressing Indonesia's room for strategic maneuver.

Currently, the core characteristic of Sino-US competition is not merely reflected in bilateral tensions but exhibits highly structural, protracted, and globalized trends. This competitive dynamic continuously spills over into multiple domains—ranging from politics and economics to security and maritime affairs—meaning that any originally technical or cooperative issue can be co-opted into the narrative framework of great power rivalry. In this context, Indonesia's traditionally reliant hedging strategy faces unprecedented pressure, its space for policy choices is significantly compressed, and its diplomatic actions are highly susceptible to being interpreted by one competitor as a pivot toward the other, thereby incurring political pressure, economic countermeasures, or security warnings. Indonesia's attempt at "dual alignment" during its application to join the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the BRICS mechanism epitomizes this restricted strategic space. Indonesia attempts to align with high international economic and trade standards by applying for OECD membership, while simultaneously leveraging a prospective BRICS membership to bolster its position as a leader of the Global South, thereby achieving a balance between major powers. However, in practice, this balancing strategy is highly prone to triggering strategic miscalculations by these powers. The transparency and regulatory reforms required for OECD accession are often interpreted by Washington as Indonesia moving closer to Western rules; conversely, its posture of moving closer to BRICS is easily perceived by the US and the West as a strategic tilt toward China.

This dual squeeze forces Indonesia to make difficult trade-offs between divergent order standards on highly sensitive issues such as digital governance and critical mineral supply chains, subjecting its "independent and active" foreign policy principle to increasingly severe tests at the operational level.

4.1.2 The Paradox of Increased Participation and Diluted Substantive Influence

To navigate the pressures of great power competition and enhance its international voice, the Prabowo administration has further intensified its participation in multilateral mechanisms, building upon estab-

lished diplomatic traditions. The core logic of this strategy lies in balancing diverse major power forces to prevent any single state from achieving dominance within these multilateral frameworks. However, when multiple competing major powers converge on the same multilateral platform, the platform's agenda-setting, rule-making, and resource allocation inevitably devolve into outcomes of great power bargaining and compromise. During this process, although middle powers like Indonesia formally gain more opportunities for participation, their influence in shaping substantive agendas and exporting rules is comparatively diluted. In other words, increased multilateral participation does not necessarily translate into a commensurate growth in institutional voice.

Furthermore, the multilateral mechanisms that Indonesia participates in or promotes predominantly belong to large-scale, broad-membership mega-multilateral platforms. While inherently designed to emphasize inclusivity and representativeness, these mechanisms universally face the problem of inefficient decision-making in actual operation. Under conditions of highly divergent member interests, the principle of consensus often compels parties to reach agreements through a lowest common denominator approach or deliberate ambiguity. This impairs the action capacity of multilateral mechanisms when addressing complex global governance issues, making it difficult for these platforms to form effective constraints on great power behavior.

For Indonesia, this structural dilemma means that it often bears substantial coordination and mediation costs in multilateral arenas, yet struggles to genuinely embed its own preferences into institutional outcomes. This creates a paradox of increased participation but diluted substantive influence, emerging as a major systemic barrier to Indonesia's diplomatic practices.

4.1.3 Internal Fragmentation in ASEAN Constraining Diplomatic Influence

ASEAN has long served as the core platform for Indonesia to exercise its regional leadership role and amplify its international influence. However, the contemporary international system is highly fragmented, which exacerbates divergent positions among ASEAN member states and increasingly constrains Indonesia's capacity to project influence through this platform, thereby cornering its regional leadership into a dilemma.

Currently, the construction of Indonesia's diplomatic influence has developed a pronounced institutional path dependence on ASEAN. For example, when building external partnerships, Indonesia generally prioritizes ASEAN Dialogue Partners—six of Indonesia's seven established comprehensive strategic partners fall into this category. Concurrently, in specific policy practice, Indonesia also tends to embed bilateral cooperation within ASEAN's existing multilateral agendas and normative frameworks, as evidenced when Indonesia and Australia advanced their Critical Minerals Partnership by explicitly referencing relevant standards in the ASEAN Minerals Cooperation Action Plan.

Nevertheless, irreconcilable differences persist among ASEAN member states. First, intra-ASEAN

divisions over “how extra-regional major powers should participate in Southeast Asian affairs” have deep historical roots and are resurfacing today. As early as the Cold War era, when Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail proposed the “Ismail Peace Plan” advocating for the neutralization of Southeast Asia guaranteed jointly by major powers, Indonesia explicitly opposed it, arguing that this would undermine regional autonomy. However, countries like Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand, harboring reservations about their own security capabilities and Indonesia’s potential dominance, were more inclined to rely on the protection of external powers. This divergence did not vanish with the end of the Cold War and has persisted in new forms amid Sino-US strategic competition. Second, contemporary economic, trade, and security shocks have further exacerbated policy fragmentation within ASEAN. In 2025, following recommendations from relevant congressional bodies, the United States implemented a differentiated tariff policy toward ASEAN countries. Although ASEAN members universally recognize the economic pressure brought by this policy, their responses have rapidly diverged due to the varying tariff margins and different impacts they endure. This fragmentation weakens ASEAN’s capacity to negotiate with the US as a cohesive bloc and fails to help Indonesia deal with the economic risk. Furthermore, Indonesia’s attempt to enhance its international influence by reinforcing its leadership role within ASEAN may inherently trigger vigilance from other regional states. This cognitive gap somewhat amplifies the intra-ASEAN security dilemma, making some member states even more inclined to hedge by deepening ties with extra-regional powers.

Consequently, when Indonesia attempts to exert its diplomatic influence, it often must first invest vast diplomatic resources in coordination and bridge-building. In reality, however, these efforts typically lead to only highly ambiguous consensus documents with more symbolic than substantive value, struggling to translate into effective collective action, which reveals that Indonesia has grand visions for regional leadership but a severe lack of execution capacity.

4.2 The Domestic Level

4.2.1 The Squeeze of the Economy-First Logic on Diplomatic Strategy

The primary domestic constraint facing Indonesia’s diplomatic practice stems from its longstanding and intensifying socio-economic contradictions. According to data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS), as of September 2024, Indonesia’s population living in poverty was approximately 24.05 million, with a poverty rate of 8.57%, while the unemployed population stood at 7.466 million, reflecting an unemployment rate of 4.91%. Since 2025, Indonesia has witnessed multiple large-scale popular protests; although their direct triggers vary, their deep-rooted causes all point to issues such as uneven income distribution, imbalanced regional development, and inadequate social security. Consequently, Indonesia’s domestic political agenda remains highly focused on improving livelihoods and economic growth, making it difficult for diplomatic strategy to occupy a core position in public perception and political priorities. A

national survey conducted in September 2025 by the local Indonesian organization Seventeen Pioneer Foundation showed that 61% of respondents viewed “poverty” as an important issue and 57% focused on the “economy,” whereas only 6% ranked “national defense” as an important issue, placing it third from the bottom among the 14 issues surveyed.

While the globalization process has brought capital, technology, and market opportunities to Indonesia, driving the continuous expansion of its economic scale, it has also significantly magnified interest divisions among different regions and social classes domestically. Coastal areas, resource-rich regions, and urban populations have benefited more from global supply chains, whereas inland areas, the agricultural population, and informal sector workers have become the primary bearers of globalization’s shocks. Against this backdrop, foreign policy is highly susceptible to demands from domestic public opinion and political forces to serve directly visible economic returns. Whether in the selection of external strategic partners or policy stances within multilateral mechanisms, there are constant demands to directly link these actions to objectives such as attracting foreign investment, expanding exports, and creating jobs. This highly instrumentalized perception of diplomacy makes it difficult for Indonesia to garner broad social support for long-term, institutional, and strategic diplomatic investments. For example, in areas such as global governance, regional security, or rule-making, relevant policies often lack the political momentum for sustained advancement due to ambiguous short-term economic gains.

Therefore, in the absence of fundamental guarantees for domestic livelihoods and economic stability, elevating international influence intrinsically struggles to become a collective priority for Indonesian society. This reality not only simply limits the input of diplomatic resources but also continually exerts constraints on foreign policy-making through democratic political mechanisms, rendering it difficult for the Prabowo administration to undertake high-cost, long-term strategic layouts on the international stage.

4.2.2 The Gap Between National Strategic Ambitions and Actual Capabilities

Compared to its continuously rising diplomatic ambitions, Indonesia’s comprehensive national capability still exhibits obvious shortcomings, constituting the second structural dilemma in its diplomatic practice. Although Indonesia is widely regarded as a “middle power,” its state capacity remains insufficient to support a strategically assertive diplomatic positioning with greater global influence.

Economically, Indonesia has long participated in the global division of labor through resource-intensive and labor-intensive industries, resulting in relatively low technological content and value-added in manufacturing. It also faces a structural talent gap, lacking highly skilled, interdisciplinary, and domain-specific professionals. As of August 2024, Indonesia had only 2,671 engineers per million people, of which merely 15% possessed experience in AI hardware development, making the talent supply inadequate to meet rapidly growing demands. Furthermore, constrained by insufficient educational levels, a weak industrial base, and a lack of innovative capacity, Indonesia wields limited influence in high-

end manufacturing, critical technologies, and standard-setting, struggling to enter the core segments of global value chains. The scale constraints derived from this economic base dictate that it primarily plays the role of a rule-taker rather than a rule-maker in global economic governance. According to World Bank data, as of December 2023, high-technology exports accounted for only 9.08% of Indonesia's manufactured goods exports, significantly lower than the global average and the levels of major South-east Asian economies. Under these conditions, Indonesia's standalone influence is insufficient to alter the decision-making trajectories of major powers on critical issues, compelling it to rely more heavily on collective mechanisms to amplify its influence. However, even when leveraging platforms like the G20 to boost visibility, domestic deficiencies such as lagging infrastructure and an imperfect logistics system severely constrain the substantive materialization of its strategic visions.

In addition, the shortcomings in Indonesia's diplomatic capacity are equally prominent. On one hand, Indonesia has limited capabilities in strategic assessment, dynamic analysis of great power competition, and forward-looking policy design; its efficiency in multilateral negotiations and agenda-setting is not high, and its response mechanisms to sudden diplomatic crises lag relatively behind. On the other hand, the updating of the organizational structure and talent cultivation systems within diplomatic institutions is slow, and there is an insufficient professional reserve in emerging fields such as international law, digital governance, and climate change, making it difficult to adapt to an increasingly complex diplomatic environment. Concurrently, coordination mechanisms in Indonesia between the foreign ministry and core departments such as defense and economy are inefficient, and the capacity for resource integration is limited, weakening the nexus between foreign policy and domestic development strategies. Policy documents released by the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs point out that diplomatic practice has long faced multiple challenges, including insufficient support from relevant ministries and agencies in executing agreements, a lag in aligning domestic policies with international commitments, and differences in priorities based on sectoral interests among various departments. On this basis, the Prabowo administration has adopted a highly presidential-driven, hands-on operational model for diplomacy. Although this approach has temporarily enhanced decision-making efficiency and political mobilization capacity, it has also weakened the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' role in policy coordination and professional assessment, resulting in a decline in policy continuity and institutionalization. Diplomatic decision-making relies heavily on personal judgment, which not only increases policy uncertainty but also undermines the overall resilience of the diplomatic system.

4.2.3 The Tension Between Domestic Nationalism and External Engagement

Indonesia's foreign policy has long been shaped by strong nationalist sentiments, rooted deeply in the historical experiences of its anti-colonial struggle and national independence. The struggle against Dutch colonial rule in the 1940s reinforced, at the political-cultural level, Indonesia's vigilance against the

interventions from external forces. Indonesia once viewed neocolonialism and imperialism as core threats and positioned itself as a representative leader of newly independent states. This historical memory has not faded with regime changes; instead, it continues to shape the cognitive framework through which contemporary Indonesian society perceives the behavior of major powers. In public discourse, foreign investment, international institutions, and major power influence are often imbued with a sense of potential threat, a perception that directly impacts the policymaking process. Taking mineral resource development as an example, the Indonesian administration, on one hand, hopes to drive industrial upgrading by attracting foreign investment, while on the other hand, it frequently reinforces a sense of resource sovereignty to increase national revenues through export bans and contract renegotiations. Although this policy oscillation caters to domestic nationalist sentiments in the short term, it significantly increases policy uncertainty, damages international investor confidence, and triggers multiple trade disputes.

Consequently, Indonesia oscillates between external opening and safeguarding national sovereignty, presenting challenges to the stability and predictability of its foreign policy and making it difficult to sustain higher levels of international cooperation and institutional influence.

4.2.4 The Constraints of Multiple Identity Constructions on Diplomatic Neutrality

As a highly diverse nation, Indonesia has simultaneously constructed multiple diplomatic identities: a middle power, a regional power, a maritime nation, and the world's most populous Muslim-majority country. While these identities expand its diplomatic space to some extent, they also significantly raise the costs of policy coordination. Using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an example, because Indonesia is a prominent member of the Islamic world, the deep sympathy of the Indonesian public for Palestine intertwines with sentiments of pan-Islamic solidarity, forging a pervasive negative perception of Israel. This powerful social consensus, channeled through domestic political mechanisms, translates directly into rigid constraints on the administration's foreign policy. Based on national conditions, the Prabowo administration explicitly set the "two-state solution" as a precondition for establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. While this stance complies with domestic religious public opinion, it also restricts Indonesia's capacity to intervene in Israeli-Palestinian affairs as a mediator, causing it to miss potential opportunities to elevate its international influence. Evidently, while granting diplomatic space to Indonesia, multiple identities simultaneously and persistently constrain the flexibility and neutrality of its foreign policy through the transmission of social consensus and domestic political mechanisms, forcing Indonesia to weigh identity-driven demands against realistic interests.

5 Conclusion

Following the inauguration of the Prabowo administration, the shifts in the posture and style of

Indonesian diplomacy reflect a political intent to break through existing diplomatic inertia, enhance international visibility, and elevate strategic initiative. However, this “strategic assertiveness” has not emerged under conditions of a significant leap in state capacity or a fundamental alleviation of domestic structural contradictions; rather, structural constraints persist, imposing significant limitations on its substantive operational significance. Building on this premise, this article has employed the level-of-analysis approach to examine the dilemmas of Indonesia’s diplomatic practice at both the systemic and domestic levels. The findings reveal that the Prabowo administration’s strategically assertive diplomatic posture confronts international systemic pressures such as the intensification of great power rivalry, the paradox of multilateral participation, and intra-ASEAN fragmentation. Simultaneously, domestic-level factors—including the prioritization of livelihood development, limited state capacity, nationalist sentiments, and national identity construction—further exacerbate these practical diplomatic dilemmas, severely compressing its space for policy execution. The in-depth analysis of the practical dilemmas in the Prabowo administration’s foreign policy presented in this article establishes a foundation for understanding its diplomatic outcomes, thereby offering a complementary perspective for the academic community to systematically track and evaluate its future diplomatic behavior.

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Author Contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

Availability of Data and Materials

The data on which the study is based are available through the following link.

https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/yz_676205/1206_677244/1206x0_677246/

https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_30671895

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/TX.VAL.TECH.MF.ZS?end=2024&start=2007&view=chart>

<https://databoks.katadata.co.id/demografi/statistik/692e6a5986547/daftar-isu-yang-jadi-prioritas-war-ga-ri-september-2025>

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the present study.

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