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## Indonesia's Geopolitical Calculation as a Middle Power in the Board of Peace Membership

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**Abstract:** Indonesia's decision to join the US-led Board of Peace (BoP) on January 22, 2026, raised significant debate regarding its consistency with the nation's *bebas aktif* (independent and active) foreign policy principle. However, existing literature has not systematically analyzed Indonesia's geopolitical calculation as a middle power in this specific case. This study aims to unpack the strategic logic behind Indonesia's BoP membership. Using a qualitative single case study design, it integrates Middle Power Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis through deductive content analysis of official documents, bilateral agreements, and think-tank reports. Three main findings emerge. First, a strong temporal correlation exists between BoP membership and the finalization of the Indonesia-US Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART) signed on the same day, revealing a diplomatic-economic nexus. Second, Indonesia's choice to contribute military capabilities rather than financial fees reflects niche diplomacy logic. Third, BoP membership signals a shift from traditional non-alignment toward pragmatic multi-alignment, with the independent-active principle retained as a rhetorical frame. This study contributes to middle power literature by demonstrating that emerging middle powers prioritize strategic pragmatism over normative commitments.

**Keywords:** geopolitical calculation, middle power, Board of Peace, Indonesian foreign policy, independent and active

### INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy is the state tool in the promotion of national interests of a state in the international arena. In the case of Indonesia, the constitutional basis of foreign policy lies in the Fourth Paragraph of the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, which is operationalized in the form of the principle of *bebas aktif* (independent and active) in foreign policy, which is freedom to choose the position without being bound to any power bloc, but being actively involved in solving global problems (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 37 Tahun 1999 Tentang Hubungan Luar Negeri, 1999). Originally declared by Hatta (1948) in his speech of September 2, 1948, *Rowing Between Two Reefs*, this principle has been introduced as the standard of consistency in all the decisions of the Indonesian foreign policy.

Indonesia has changed its foreign policy orientation under the new president Prabowo Subianto who assumed office in October 2024 as a result of a multi-alignment approach that focuses on intense simultaneous relations with several great powers (The Conversation Indonesia, 2026). This debate reached its peak when on January 22, 2026 in Davos, Prabowo signed the Board of Peace (BoP) Charter designed with the help of US President Donald Trump to supervise the process of Gaza post-conflict transition and reconstruction (Sekretariat Negara RI, 2026c). Indonesia was the only country in Southeast Asia to join the country and it led to a wide scholarly argument as to whether it was consistent with the independent and active principle (IIS UGM, 2026).

The scholarly literature on Indonesia as a middle power has become quite extensive, especially regarding ASEAN (Alvian et al., 2018), G20 (Sudjatmiko et al., 2022), and the work of the UN peacekeeping (Anwar, 2021). However, no article that combines the Middle Power Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) to understand the geopolitical calculation of Indonesia concerning the BoP membership has been discovered in Scopus- and Sinta-indexed databases by March 2026. This study fills a critical gap by simultaneously integrating three conceptual frameworks: Middle Power Theory as a positional lens explaining Indonesia's typical role in the international system (Cooper et al., 1993; Holbraad, 1984; Teo, 2022); FPA as a process lens tracing decision-making across three levels individual, domestic, and systemic including the concepts of role conflict and role legitimation relevant to explaining the gap between the independent and active narrative and BoP membership practice (Holsti, 1970; Hudson, 2005; Karim, 2021); and geopolitical calculation as an analytical bridge unpacking the strategic logic behind the decision, distinct from national interest which focuses on policy goals, and from generic decision-making, by explicitly accounting for positional awareness a state's understanding of its position in the international power hierarchy as a determinant in weighing available options (Holbraad, 1984; Kaplan, 2012).

The uniqueness of this study lies in the revelation of a temporal correlation between BoP membership and the finalisation of the Indonesia-US Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART) on the same day an original empirical finding not previously documented in the existing literature. Furthermore, this study simultaneously analyses three dimensions of geopolitical calculus (national interests, strategic positioning, and management of domestic pressure) which have hitherto been discussed only in isolation. Using a single-case study approach, this research offers a nine-indicator matrix evaluation framework to systematically test consistency with the principle of free and active foreign policy. The following research question informs this study: "How did the Indonesian middle power undertake its geopolitical calculation when deciding on joining the Board of Peace? The main thesis is that the choice is based on the complex geopolitical calculation, including three parallel components: the strategic interest in expanding regional influence; the economic expediency in the establishment of bilateral relations with the US; and control over the local pressure of Islamic organizations constituting the basis of Prabowo's political legitimacy. The three dimensions create a posture that rhetorically maintains the independent and active narrative and substantively reacts to a move towards pragmatic multi-alignment. The research is limited to the date of October 2024 to March 2026.

## **METHOD**

The given work utilizes the staff of qualitative research and single case study design. According to (Yin, 2018), single case studies should be used in cases where the case is a unique or theoretically representative phenomenon. The BoP membership of Indonesia meets this requirement because as the sole Southeast Asian country to accede to it, the latter forms an analytically valuable opportunity to understand the behavior of middle powers in a modern geopolitical environment.

The unit of analysis is the geopolitical calculation process undertaken by the Indonesian government in deciding to join the Board of Peace. This process is operationalized through three dimensions: national interest (strategic, economic, and symbolic interests), strategic positioning (niche diplomacy and multi-venue engagement), and pressure management (domestic and international pressures). The temporal boundary spans October 2024, marked by Prabowo's inauguration, to March 2026, following the first BoP meeting and ART signing.

Data collection followed a systematic four-stage flow. The first stage involved identification of official government sources including Sekretariat Negara RI documents, Ministry of Foreign Affairs statements, presidential speeches, and the complete text of the Agreement on Reciprocal Trade published by the United States Trade Representative (United States Trade Representative, 2026), along with foundational regulations such as the 1945 Constitution and Law No. 37 of 1999. The second stage comprised retrieval of academic literature from Scopus and Sinta indexed journals published between 2015 and 2026, supplemented by seminal theoretical works without year limitations. The third stage involved collection of reports from international think-tanks including the Lowy Institute and Human Rights Watch, as well as credible international media such as Modern Diplomacy, CNBC Indonesia, The Conversation Indonesia, and The Columbian. The fourth stage applied document selection criteria requiring direct relevance to BoP membership, Indonesia-US trade relations, or Indonesian foreign policy during the study period.

Data analysis employed deductive content analysis using pre-defined coding categories derived from the theoretical framework rather than inductively from raw data. Documents were coded using nine geopolitical calculation indicators organized into three dimensions. For the national interest dimension, three codes were applied: NI-STR for strategic interest references to influence projection or regional leadership, NI-ECO for economic interest references to trade benefits, tariffs, or investment, and NI-SYM for symbolic interest references to the Palestinian cause or Muslim world leadership. For the strategic positioning dimension, three codes were applied: SP-ND for niche diplomacy references to capability-based contributions distinguishing troops from funding, SP-MVE for multi-venue engagement references to simultaneous forum participation in BRICS, G20, or BoP, and SP-GPR for great power relations references to US or China alignment. For the pressure management dimension, three codes were applied: PM-DOM for domestic pressure references to MUI, NU, or IIS UGM positions, PM-INT for international pressure references to the global Muslim community or diplomatic criticism, and PM-LS for legitimation strategy references to inside strategy, withdrawal threats, or religious leader engagement. Each document was coded line-by-line by the researcher, and a second coder recoded a twenty percent sample to check consistency, achieving inter-coder agreement of ninety-two percent.

A three-source cross-validation process was specifically applied to test the BoP-ART temporal correlation claim. Diplomatic chronologies from official RI and USTR documents were compared to verify dates and event sequences. Public statements from Indonesian and US authorities regarding both events were cross-referenced. Independent think-tank reports analyzing the relationship between BoP and ART were examined. A correlation claim was accepted only when all three document types provided convergent verification, not merely temporal proximity alone. As (Creswell & Poth, 2018) recommend, source triangulation was applied throughout such that every analytical statement is supported by at least one official government report, one academic publication, and one think-tank or international media source.

Interpretation proceeded through two complementary methods. First, FPA-based theoretical interpretation was conducted simultaneously at three levels of analysis following Allison & Halperin (1972) and Holsti (1970): the individual level examining Prabowo's strategic calculus and legitimation strategies, the domestic level examining Islamic

organization pressures and bureaucratic politics, and the systemic level examining US-China competition and middle power positioning. Second, a nine-indicator evaluation matrix was constructed to systematically assess consistency with the independent-active principle, with each indicator rated as compatible, tension, or substantial shift based on coded evidence. Two limitations are acknowledged. Reliance on secondary data limits access to internal decision-making processes not publicly recorded. As a single case study, findings are generalizable analytically rather than statistically (Yin, 2018). This study has no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest. This journal article is original, never before published, and not under consideration elsewhere.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Board of Peace and Indonesia's Strategic Position

The Board of Peace was established on 22 January 2026 in Davos, with UN Security Council Resolution 2803 as its international legal foundation. Structurally, BoP grants Trump lifetime chairmanship with exclusive authority a structure that prompted major Western rejection. Indonesia opted to join, becoming the sole Southeast Asian country in the forum. Before analyzing Indonesia's geopolitical calculation, its status as a middle power must be verified against theoretical requirements. Using (Teo, 2022) framework, Indonesia satisfies all three middle power dimensions across position, identity, and behaviour. Positionally, Indonesia possesses the largest ASEAN economy and G20 membership. In terms of identity, Foreign Minister Retno explicitly stated in 2015 that Indonesia continues to play a middle power role, and external recognition is evidenced by MIKTA membership and the 2026 UN Human Rights Council presidency. Behaviourally, Indonesia actively engages in multilateral forums including ASEAN, G20, BRICS, and BoP, while focusing niche diplomacy on peace issues and the Palestinian cause.

**Table 1. Verification of Indonesia's Middle Power Position (Teo's Framework, 2022)**

Dimension	Indicator	Empirical Evidence	Assessment
Position	Economic capability	Largest ASEAN economy; G20 member	Fulfilled
Position	Military capability	>2,700 active UN peacekeeping personnel; commitment of 8,000 ISF troops	Fulfilled
Identity	Self-identification	Foreign Minister Retno (2015) stated Indonesia continues to play a middle power role	Fulfilled
Identity	External recognition	MIKTA member; 2026 UN Human Rights Council presidency	Fulfilled
Behaviour	Multilateralism	ASEAN, G20, BRICS, BoP	Fulfilled
Behaviour	Niche diplomacy	Focus on peace issues and Palestinian cause	Fulfilled
Behaviour	Neutrality credibility	Joining a US-dominated forum	Threatened

*Source: Adapted from Teo (2022), Alvian et al. (2018), Lowy Institute (2026)*

This indicates that Indonesia objectively meets the criteria for a middle-income country according to Teo (2022) framework; consequently, the application of the Middle-Power Theory in analysing BoP decisions constitutes a methodologically sound approach.

However, the most vital dimension credibility as the foundation of middle power influence is the one most threatened by the BoP decision. During the first BoP meeting in Washington on February 19, 2026, Prabowo positioned Indonesia as a middle and fair broker

between great powers (The Columbian, 2026), consistent with (Cooper et al., 1993) model of a catalyst and facilitator. Yet official reports reveal a conflict between loyal and critical ally postures (Holbraad, 1984). Prabowo repeatedly threatened to withdraw if BoP did not benefit Palestine a critical ally rhetoric while simultaneously promising the largest troop commitment and becoming the only leader to secure a bilateral meeting with Trump during the same forum. These findings support the concept of role conflict put forward by Holsti (1970): there is a tension between the conception of Indonesia’s role as an independent actor and the actual performance of that role, which demonstrates operational alignment with the US agenda.

### Indonesia's Geopolitical Calculation: Three Dimensions Dimension of National Interest

Strategically, Prabowo told provincial and municipal leaders that if Indonesia were truly non-aligned, it would stand alone (Lowy Institute, 2026). This represents a radical epistemological shift, where non-alignment is no longer viewed as a strength but as strategic isolationism. BoP membership provides Indonesia with an official mechanism to project influence as the voice of the world's largest Muslim nation in a Gaza peace forum a strategically selected niche (Cooper, 1997).

The strongest empirical observation of this research concerns the temporal correlation between BoP membership and finalization of the Indonesia-US Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART). According to the official ART document released by the USTR (2026), signing occurred on the same day as the first BoP meeting, February 19, 2026. Indonesia was the only BoP member country to secure a direct bilateral meeting with Trump during the forum. A chronological comparison of events reveals that following the US unilateral imposition of a thirty-two percent reciprocal tariff on Indonesia on April 2, 2025, the tariff was reduced to nineteen percent in a Joint Statement on Framework ART on July 15, 2025. Prabowo signed the BoP Charter in Davos on January 22, 2026, and the inaugural BoP meeting alongside the bilateral meeting with Trump and the official ART signing both occurred on February 19, 2026.

**Table 2. Chronology of the BoP–ART Nexus**

Date	Event	Source
Apr 2, 2025	US unilaterally imposes 32% reciprocal tariff on Indonesia	Sekretariat Negara RI, 2026c
Jul 15, 2025	Tariff reduced to 19% in Joint Statement on Framework ART	Sekretariat Negara RI, 2026c
Jan 22, 2026	Prabowo signs BoP Charter in Davos	Sekretariat Negara RI, 2026a
Feb 19, 2026	Inaugural BoP meeting + bilateral meeting with Trump	The Columbian, 2026
Feb 19, 2026	ART officially signed on the same day	USTR, 2026

*Source: Adapted from USTR (2026), Sekretariat Negara RI (2026a, 2026c, 2026b), The Columbian (2026)*

This indicates that there is a strong temporal correlation between BoP membership and the completion of ART, even though the government officially denies any direct link between the two events. According to the ART text USTR (2026), Indonesia obtained substantial tariff concessions, including exemption from Executive Order 14257 additional tariffs on 1,819 tariff positions covering palm oil, coffee, cocoa, and rubber, which received zero tariffs, alongside a zero-tariff rate quota system for textile products protecting four million workers (Sekretariat Negara RI, 2026b). However, ART also imposes significant obligations on Indonesia, including open access for ninety-nine percent of US products at zero tariff, minimum imports of 3.5 million metric tons per year of US soybeans and 2 million metric tons per year of wheat,

purchase of US energy products worth USD 15 billion, and purchase of US aircraft and components worth USD 13.5 billion totaling USD 33 billion in purchases over five years. Crucially, Article 5.1 requires Indonesia to align its economic security policy with US actions against third countries. These findings support the argument put forward by (Allison & Halperin, 1972) that the interests of the bureaucracy and the domestic economy in particular the protection of four million textile workers were instrumental factors in reinforcing the legitimacy of the BoP's decision in the eyes of the Indonesian public.

**Table 3. Analysis of Indonesia's Benefits and Obligations under ART**

Aspect	Indonesia's Benefits	Indonesia's Obligations	ART Clause
Export tariffs	1,819 products at 0% tariff; general tariff 32%→19%	Open access for 99% of US products at 0% tariff	Annex I, Schedule 1 & 2
Key commodities	CPO, coffee, cocoa, rubber at 0% tariff	Import min. 3.5 million MT/year US soybeans; 2 million MT/year wheat	Annex IV, Section B
Textiles & apparel	0% tariff via TRQ; 4 million workers protected	Import min. 163,000 MT/year US cotton	Article 6.3 & Annex IV
Energy	Access to critical mineral investment	Purchase US energy USD 15 billion	Annex IV, Section A
Aviation	EXIM Bank & DFC financing access	Purchase US aircraft & components USD 13.5 billion	Annex IV, Article A.3
Total purchases	—	USD 33 billion over 5 years	Annex IV
Economic security	Non-economic clauses (SCS, nuclear) removed	Align economic security policy with US	Article 5.1

*Source: Adapted from USTR (2026), Sekretariat Negara RI (2026a, 2026b)*

Even though the government rejected any direct relationship between BoP and ART, the temporal coincidence and the diplomatic situation confirmed in three types of documents analytically prove that BoP membership was a diplomatic facilitator of bilateral economic benefits. The tangible advantages of ART especially its role in safeguarding millions of employees were also instrumental reasons that enhanced the legitimacy of the BoP decision according to the Indonesian population point of view (Allison & Halperin, 1972).

In the light of symbolic interest, the membership in the BoP is Prabowo's attempt to recreate the national narrative with the help of a role legitimization process (Karim, 2021): not to ignore the Palestinian cause, but to promote it within the platform. According to official governmental sources, the membership of BoP is meant to promote the end of violence and safeguarding of Palestinian civilians (Sekretariat Negara RI, 2026c). Nevertheless, there is a paradox in this approach: BoP includes no direct promise to the two-state solution, and its priority has changed to the post-conflict reconciliation, and not the recognition of the Palestinian independence (Modern Diplomacy, 2026). This indicates that there is a disconnect between the symbolic narrative used to legitimise domestic decisions and the actual substance of the forum, which does not explicitly support full Palestinian independence.

### Dimension of Strategic Positioning

Indonesia made a different form of engagement: the refusal to pay the USD 1 billion premium membership fee, but the promise to send 8,000 peacekeeping forces (Indonesia Business Post, 2026). In the niche diplomacy context (Cooper, 1997), this puts Indonesia within the context of providing operational capability and doing so within the niche of comparative advantage in terms of its internationally acknowledged peace keeping experience thus

maximized influence without stressing the state coffers.. The fact that Indonesia is concurrently participating in BoP and BRICS indicates a multi-venue engagement strategy: using many forums at once in order to gain as much influence as possible and reduce reliance on one platform. According to (Iannone, 2026), Indonesia is rebranding itself in a world where institutions are pressured, norms are challenged, and internal politics is rapidly shifting at the global scale. These findings support Iannone's (2026) view that Indonesia is repositioning itself amidst pressure on global institutions, challenges to norms, and rapid shifts in domestic politics.

### **Dimension of Pressure Management**

The pressure inside the country is caused by large Islamic organizations. Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) evaluated the role of Israel in BoP as a very serious structural problem that would not transform the issue of justice to one of conflict management alone (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2026). In the academic context, (IIS UGM, 2026) also wrote that BoP participation in Indonesia does not reflect the national values and anti-colonial principles under the existing conditions. The response provided by Prabowo was a multi-layered way of legitimizing the role (Karim, 2021): welcoming the leaders of religious organizations into direct meetings, justifying the strategy as inside, and threatening to withdraw in case BoP does not benefit Palestine. The approach gained conditional approval of Nahdlatul Ulama that declared that no other party had made a tangible move other than Trump (Human Rights Watch, 2026).

This suggests that domestic pressures were successfully managed through legitimation strategies, though not entirely resolved a situation similar to Karim's (2021) findings regarding Indonesia's legitimation diplomacy during the previous presidential term. On the international front, (Rezasyah, 2026), an International Relations scholar at Padjadjaran University, observed that Indonesia is under straddling pressure on both ends; the necessity to continue having access to the US market economically on the one hand, and the pressure of the global Muslim community to have a consistent pro-Palestinian stance on the other hand. BoP membership was an instrument which, in the short run, would fulfill both of these pressures at once. But Article 5.1 of ART that requires Indonesia to coordinate its economic security policies with US actions against third countries (United States Trade Representative, 2026) shows that this external pressure is no longer just a diplomatic one, but is legally enforceable in a bilateral agreement. This finding supports the argument that external pressure has shifted from being diplomatic in nature to being legally binding, which has implications for the erosion of Indonesia's foreign policy autonomy.

### **Pro-BoP Arguments and Analytical Response**

In order to provide an analytical balance, it is imperative to note that there are academic arguments in support of the BoP decision. According to (Rezasyah, 2026), Indonesia can engage in critical diplomacy domestically and shape the international agenda by leveraging its status as a member state of the union a point that fits into the scheme of the facilitator concept as developed by (Cooper et al., 1993). Constitutionally, Article 3 of Law No. 37 of 1999 requires active engagement in world peace and BoP, based on UNSC Resolution 2803, officially fulfills this mandate (Sekretariat Negara RI, 2026b). Moreover, (CNBC Indonesia, 2026) insists that being outside the negotiating table is something that Indonesia will be nothing more than an observer as others take the decisions they will make, so, engagement is a better solution than isolation.

This indicates that there are rational arguments in favour of the BoP decision, particularly from a constitutional perspective and in terms of diplomatic pragmatism. Such arguments have justifiable grounds and they cannot be rejected. This research paper, however, claims that they

are not enough to explain the entire pattern of geopolitical calculation that is identified - especially in the light of three analytically incontrovertible facts that first, the BoP-ART nexus was signed on the same day; second, ART Article 5.1 on the limit of Indonesian economic policy autonomy against third countries; and third, the on hold decision of March 2026 A genuine approach to carrying out critical diplomacy by the state internally does not require the state to suspend its involvement when the dynamics of the forum deviate off course. These findings strongly suggest that membership of the BoP reflects pragmatic calculations that constrain policy autonomy rather than merely a strategy of critical diplomacy from within.

**Evaluation: Independent and Active as a Rhetorical Frame**

Based on the analysis across three dimensions, a systematic evaluation matrix reveals the consistency of Indonesia's geopolitical calculation against the independent and active principle. Among nine indicators analyzed, only two soft power projection through niche diplomacy based on military capability and formal compatibility with new multilateral roles are fully compatible with the principle. Two indicators symbolic interest maintained through rhetoric and domestic pressure management show managed tension rather than full resolution. Five indicators demonstrate substantial shift or erosion: strategic interest moving from non-alignment toward multi-alignment, economic interest showing pragmatism overriding principle (tariff reduction from thirty-two percent to nineteen percent alongside USD 33 billion obligations), great power relations management signaling Washington alignment while eroding neutrality, international pressure showing only partial balancing through simultaneous BRICS membership, and public legitimation maintaining narrative while substantively shifting policy.

This research provides a detailed evaluation matrix based on the analysis in three dimensions.

**Table 4. Evaluation Matrix of Geopolitical Calculation Against the Independent and Active Principle**

Indicator	Empirical Finding	Consistency with Independent and Active
Strategic interest	Shift from non-alignment toward multi-alignment	Substantial shift
Economic interest	BoP-ART nexus; tariff 32%→19%; USD 33 billion obligations	Pragmatism overrides principle
Symbolic interest	"Strategy from within" as role legitimation	Rhetoric maintained
New multilateral role	Multi-venue engagement in BoP and BRICS	Formally compatible
Soft power projection	Niche diplomacy based on military capability	Compatible
Great power relations management	Washington alignment signal; ART Article 5.1	Erodes neutrality
Domestic pressure	Role legitimation neutralizes NU opposition	Tension managed, not resolved
International pressure	BRICS as counterbalance to BoP	Partial balancing
Public legitimation	Three complementary frames (constitutional, humanitarian, pragmatic)	Narrative maintained, substance shifted

*Source: Researcher's analysis (2026)*

This indicates that, of the nine indicators, only two are fully compatible with the principle of free and active diplomacy, whilst five indicators reveal tensions or substantive shifts. These

findings support Jordaan's (2010) conclusion that emerging middle powers exhibit patterns of engagement driven by strategic pragmatism rather than normative commitment alone. Membership of the BoP indicates an ongoing paradigmatic shift: the principle of active neutrality has not been formally abandoned, but has been redefined as a rhetorical framework to legitimise pragmatic multi-alignment. This validates the notion that Indonesia exhibits reactive participation rather than agenda-setting, which characterises a true middle power according to Cooper et al. (1993).

## CONCLUSION

This paper addresses how Indonesia, as a middle power, conducted its geopolitical calculation in joining the Board of Peace, yielding three interrelated findings. First, Indonesia's geopolitical calculation is multidimensional and cannot be reduced to a single motive. Examination of official sources indicates that the Agreement on Reciprocal Trade, which offers 1,819 of Indonesia's major export goods zero tariffs and lowers the overall tariff from thirty-two to nineteen percent, was signed on the same day as the first BoP meeting. This diplomatic nexus strongly indicates that BoP membership served as a diplomatic facilitator of tangible economic interests. However, the agreement also imposes on Indonesia substantial purchase commitments and economic security alignment terms that constrain diplomatic freedom something not acknowledged in the government's official version. This BoP-ART nexus constitutes the original empirical contribution of this paper.

Second, Indonesia's middle power status shapes the distinctive nature of its involvement through niche diplomacy logic making contributions in its area of comparative advantage, namely operational peacekeeping capacity. Nonetheless, the March 2026 "on hold" decision confirms that such engagement is more reactive than agenda-setting, which is the hallmark of a genuine middle power.

Third, among the nine indicators analyzed, only two are fully compatible with the independent and active principle. This validates existing findings that emerging middle powers exhibit engagement patterns driven by pragmatic strategic reasons rather than normative commitments alone. The independent and active principle has not been regressively discarded but redefined as a rhetorical frame in the transition toward pragmatic multi-alignment.

## Theoretical Implications

This research makes three contributions to existing theory. First, regarding Middle Power Theory, the study demonstrates that emerging middle powers like Indonesia do not always conform to the classical facilitator or catalyst roles described in the literature. Instead, they may simultaneously perform multiple and sometimes contradictory roles critical ally rhetoric alongside operational proximity to a great power. This suggests that the typology of middle power behaviour requires expansion to accommodate the pragmatic multi-alignment strategies of emerging powers.

Second, concerning Foreign Policy Analysis, the study empirically validates the utility of integrating three levels of analysis individual, domestic, and systemic to understand a single foreign policy decision. The findings show that the president's individual strategic calculus, domestic pressure from Islamic organizations, and systemic great power competition each contributed distinct and non-reducible explanatory power. This demonstrates how different levels of analysis interact in practice to shape foreign policy outcomes.

Third, for the concept of geopolitical calculation, this study operationalizes the term beyond traditional usage by developing nine measurable indicators across three dimensions: national interest, strategic positioning, and pressure management. The BoP-ART nexus provides empirical evidence that geopolitical calculation involves explicit trade-offs between

symbolic interests, economic interests, and strategic positioning trade-offs that are often implicit in existing literature.

### **Practical Implications**

For Indonesian policymakers, this study offers three actionable insights. First, the BoP-ART nexus demonstrates that participation in great power-led initiatives carries explicit economic security trade-offs. The agreement legally binds Indonesia to align its economic policy with the great power's actions against third countries. Policymakers must recognize that such clauses erode the substantive meaning of the independent and active principle even when the rhetorical frame is maintained.

Second, the conditional approval from some Islamic organizations and criticism from others indicate that domestic legitimation strategies have limits. The March 2026 "on hold" decision suggests that when forum dynamics deviate from stated objectives, suspension of participation becomes necessary to maintain domestic credibility. Third, for Indonesian foreign diplomacy, the multi-venue engagement strategy of simultaneously joining multiple forums demonstrates that middle powers can partially balance great power alignment by diversifying forum participation. However, this strategy only mitigates, rather than resolves, the fundamental tension between pragmatic economic interests and normative foreign policy principles.

### **Limitations**

Three limitations are acknowledged. First, as a single case study, the findings are generalizable analytically rather than statistically. The patterns observed in Indonesia's BoP decision may not apply to other middle powers or to different policy domains.

Second, reliance on secondary data limits access to internal decision-making processes. Cabinet meeting minutes, internal ministry memoranda, and direct communications between officials during the negotiation period were not available for analysis.

Third, there is no access to the internal decision-making process regarding the simultaneous timing of BoP signing and agreement finalization. While the temporal correlation is empirically documented, whether this reflects explicit bargaining, implicit understanding, or coincidental timing cannot be definitively established from publicly available sources alone.

### **Future Research**

Four directions for future research are recommended. First, comparative studies examining other Muslim-majority BoP member states would determine whether Indonesia's pattern of pragmatic multi-alignment is unique or reflects a broader trend among emerging middle powers responding to great power geopolitical initiatives.

Second, in-depth interviews with elite policymakers directly involved in the BoP negotiation and trade agreement finalization would provide access to the internal decision making processes that secondary data cannot capture. Key informants would include former and current officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Trade, and the Presidential Office.

Third, cross-country analysis comparing Indonesia's BoP decision with its participation in other great power-led initiatives would reveal whether the pattern of rhetorical maintenance of the independent and active principle alongside substantive pragmatic shift is consistent across policy domains or specific to security forums led by a particular great power.

Fourth, process-tracing studies reconstructing the sequence of events between the initial tariff imposition and the final agreement signing would clarify causal mechanisms underlying the BoP-ART nexus specifically whether economic concessions preceded, accompanied, or followed security alignment decisions.

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