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## China's Global Security Initiative: A View from Indonesia

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### SYNOPSIS

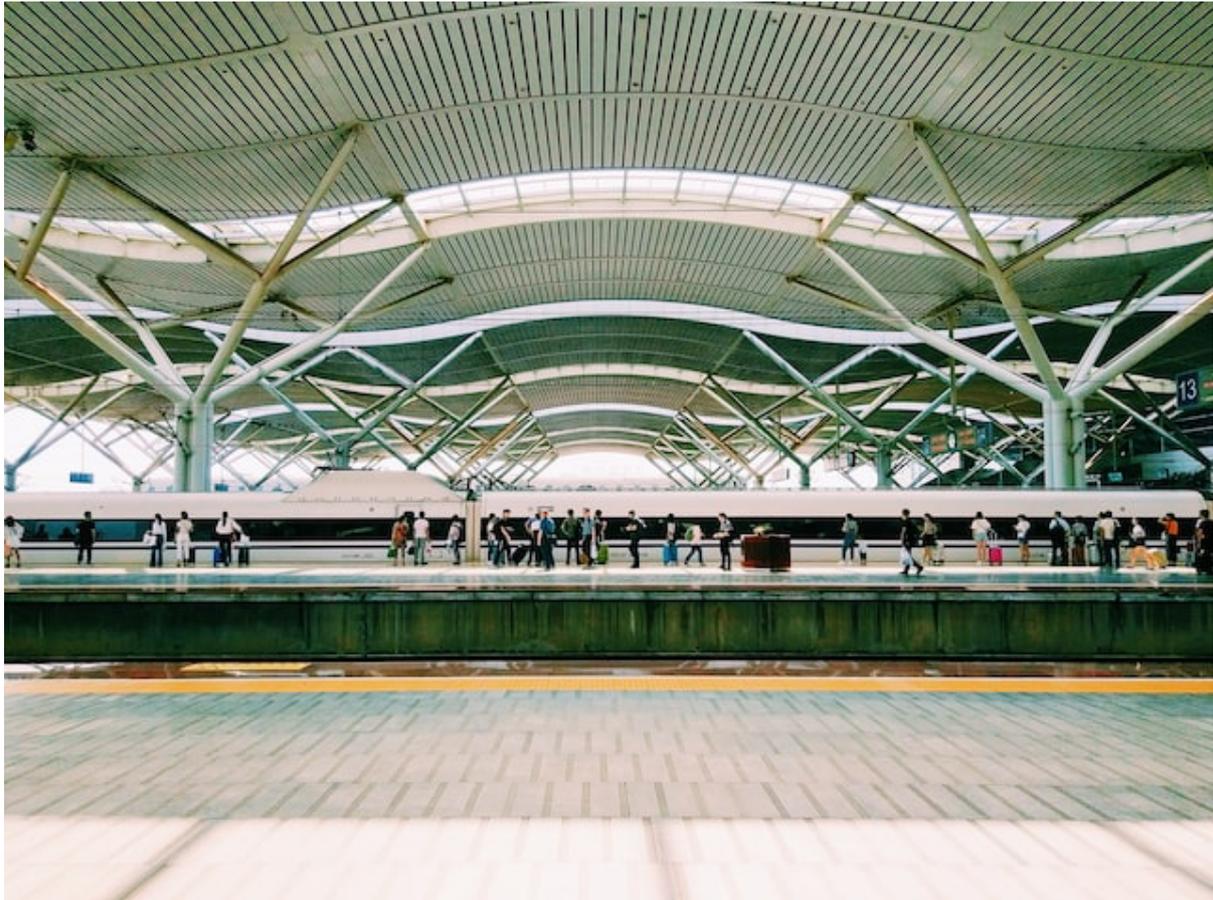
*China announced its Global Security Initiative in April this year. Some elements of the GSI are attractive to Indonesian policymakers, highlighting its concerns with the existing international order. Yet, cognisant of the risks of endorsing a Chinese global security vision in light of its own interests in the North Natuna Sea, Indonesia is wary of throwing its full support behind the proposal, argue **ARISTYO DARMAWAN** and **JEFFERSON NG**.*

### COMMENTARY

In their first face-to-face meeting in three years, Indonesian president Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, met in Beijing in July this year. During the meeting, both countries affirmed their strong ties and stressed that bilateral ties had "[great strategic significance](#)".

A sign of deepening bilateral ties between the two countries was the fact that Jokowi was the first foreign leader to benefit from the [relaxation of the ban on visits by foreign dignitaries](#) to China since the launch of Beijing's strict zero-COVID policy in 2020.

Since Jokowi came to power in 2014, he has done more to drive bilateral cooperation with China than any of his predecessors. Barely two weeks after he had assumed office, he made his first visit to Beijing in November that year, followed by additional visits annually between 2015 and 2017. Unsurprisingly, bilateral economic cooperation registered dramatic growth, particularly with China's realised foreign direct investments in Indonesia growing from [US\\$0.6 billion in 2015 to US\\$4.7 billion in 2019](#).



Chinese high-speed train at Changsha South station, Hunan Sheng. When Indonesia awarded the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Rail project to China in 2015, the project was regarded as a diplomatic coup for China. 7 years on, the project remains mired in cost overruns and delays. *Photo* by Ian Deng on Unsplash.

## **The Global Security Initiative: Is Indonesia Supporting a Chinese World Order?**

A key, hitherto under-recognised, outcome of the Jokowi-Xi meeting in July 2022 is reflected in the [joint press statement](#) issued by the foreign ministries of the two countries, which states that Indonesia “takes note of the Global Security Initiative (GSI) and stands ready to work with the Chinese side in ensuring peace and stability through dialogue and diplomacy”.

The GSI was introduced in April 2022 by Xi at the Boao Forum for Asia. It represents the Chinese effort to promote a distinct alternative to the US-led world order. Some experts have argued that China is attempting to reinterpret global legal norms to advance “[international law with Chinese characteristics](#)” through the GSI and related measures.

Some of the ideas proposed under the GSI are aligned with established international practice, including respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, non-interference in internal affairs, and respect for the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.

However, other ideas packaged with the GSI clearly reflect China’s position that the [United States is undermining global security](#). For instance, the GSI calls on countries to “reject the Cold War mentality”, “say no to group politics”, “oppose the pursuit of

one's own security at the cost of others' security", and "oppose the wanton use of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction".

There are at least two key reasons why Indonesia has expressed what appears to be tentative support for the GSI. First, Indonesia and China share common concerns in relation to the existing international order. As a senior diplomat to Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs commented off the record, just as China is concerned about US intervention in Taiwan, Indonesia is concerned about foreign intervention in Papua. As a result, both countries agree that the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs needs to be upheld.

Second, it is apparent that burgeoning bilateral economic cooperation has made Indonesia more receptive to Chinese diplomatic overtures. During a [virtual meeting](#) between China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, and Indonesian minister Luhut Pandjaitan in June 2022, the latter stressed that Indonesia was ready to deepen bilateral cooperation on signature projects such as the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway and participate actively in the GSI as well as its sister initiative, the Global Development Initiative.

### **A Substantial Foreign Policy Shift?**

However, it is much more likely that Indonesia has only agreed in principle to work with China on the GSI while waiting for the latter to more clearly articulate and elaborate on the initiative, which remains ill-defined. This view is based on three observations. First, the language used in the aforesaid joint statement is cautious: Indonesia "takes note" of the GSI. It represents compromise language rather than a wholehearted declaration of support for the GSI.

Second, Indonesian press releases relating to Jokowi's visit and meeting with Xi published on the websites of both the [Cabinet Secretary](#) and the [Presidential Office](#) made no reference to remarks supporting the GSI. For instance, the press release on the website of the Cabinet Secretary mentioned only bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the context of the Global Development Initiative. The failure to mention the GSI suggests ambivalence about the GSI; the Indonesian government may be concerned about how its domestic audience will view its support for the GSI.

Third, Indonesian policymakers are aware that the interests of the two countries do not converge perfectly. Indonesia is embroiled in a persistent, low-intensity dispute with China over its sovereign right to exploit the resources within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). This area, which Indonesia has renamed the North Natuna Sea, overlaps with China's so-called nine-dash line. Indonesia is in a bind — it does not want to openly confront Beijing over the latter's encroachment into its EEZ as it does not wish to jeopardise its economic relationship with China, but, on the other hand, it cannot fail to defend its sovereign rights either.

Indonesia's ambivalence on the North Natuna Sea issue gives China's a perfect excuse to conduct grey zone tactics in the South China Sea in the area. In September 2022, a Chinese Coast Guard patrol boat [allegedly entered](#) Indonesia's EEZ, and, according to the head of the Natuna Fisherman Alliance, intimidated Indonesian fisherman off the Natuna Islands. In another example, late last year, China lodged a

[protest](#) against Indonesia's oil drilling within its EEZ, claiming that the activity was in fact taking place in Chinese territory.

### **Should Indonesia Support the GSI?**

It is important for Southeast Asian countries, particularly Indonesia, to support peaceful initiatives in the region — including China's GSI — to avoid any possible tensions and escalations in a disputed area such as the South China Sea. However, support for the GSI should not be unconditional. It should be based on whether China can gain the trust of Southeast Asian countries by proving that it is implementing the principles of the GSI and avoiding double standards in implementation. Indonesia should leverage its burgeoning bilateral relationship with China to foster peace and security in the region, particularly when negotiating the long-planned South China Sea Code of Conduct.

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