

## Indonesia's Development Diplomacy in Great Power Competition and ASEAN-Global South Interdependence 2025–2026

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### ABSTRACT

*This study analyzes Indonesia's development diplomacy strategy in response to the dynamics of the increasingly intense competition between the United States and China in the 2025 period until now. The transformation of the global development finance architecture—especially through the expansion of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the United States' Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII)—has created a structural dilemma for developing countries in the Southeast Asian region. This study identifies a research gap in the form of a lack of studies that combine the perspective of complex interdependence (Keohane & Nye) with the reality of Indonesia's contemporary development policy post-2025 within the framework of South-South Cooperation. Using a qualitative policy analysis method with a comparative case study approach, this article argues that Indonesia strategically adopts an 'active hedging' posture in development diplomacy—utilizing dual membership in the G20, ASEAN, and BRICS+ as a platform to optimize development capital flows without getting caught up in bloc rivalries. The findings suggest that the complex interdependence framework significantly explains Indonesia's capacity to diversify development partnerships, but there are theoretical limitations in explaining the identity dimensions and norms in South-South policies. The policy implications lead to the need for institutionalization of stronger multilateral coordination mechanisms within the framework of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).*

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### 1. Introduction

Since the beginning of 2025, the global development architecture has undergone significant restructuring due to intensifying competition between the United States and China in the field of development finance and infrastructure governance (Ikenberry, 2023). Rather than examining geopolitical rivalry in broad terms, this study specifically focuses on Indonesia's development diplomacy strategy in responding to the competition between the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII). Indonesia occupies a strategic position as the largest economy in Southeast Asia and simultaneously maintains relations with both initiatives through its long-standing principle of an independent and active foreign policy.

The competition between BRI and PGII has increasingly shaped the contemporary development landscape in Southeast Asia. China's BRI has mobilized more than USD 1 trillion in global infrastructure investment, while the United States and G7 countries through PGII target USD 600 billion in development financing by 2027 (World Bank, 2025). For Indonesia, these initiatives provide opportunities for infrastructure expansion, energy transition, and digital connectivity, while simultaneously generating risks of dependency, external pressure, and strategic vulnerability. Consequently, Indonesia's response cannot be understood merely as economic pragmatism, but must also be analyzed as part of a broader development diplomacy strategy.

Existing studies on Indonesia's foreign policy and development cooperation remain fragmented and tend to examine ASEAN centrality, BRICS+, South-South Cooperation, or infrastructure diplomacy separately (Fitriani, 2025; Mawdsley, 2023). Furthermore, recent structural developments including Indonesia's accession to BRICS+, the consolidation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), and the transformation of Indonesia's foreign policy orientation after 2025 have not been sufficiently integrated into current scholarly discussions (Radhiansyah et al., 2023; Prihandoko et al., 2019;

Said et al., 2021). This fragmentation has limited the analytical depth of previous studies and produced largely descriptive explanations of Indonesia's diplomatic behavior. Therefore, this article narrows its focus to Indonesia's strategic management of development partnerships amid the rivalry between BRI and PGII.

To address these limitations, this study develops an integrated analytical framework combining three complementary theoretical perspectives. First, complex interdependence theory explains how multiple economic, institutional, and diplomatic channels shape interstate relations beyond conventional military competition (Keohane & Nye, 1977). Second, the concept of weaponized interdependence highlights the possibility that global economic networks may be used as instruments of geopolitical coercion and asymmetric dependence (Farrell & Newman, 2019). Third, active hedging theory explains how middle powers strategically engage competing major powers simultaneously while avoiding exclusive alignment commitments (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019; Kuik, 2021). Through this integrated framework, the study moves beyond a descriptive discussion and provides a more systematic explanation of Indonesia's development diplomacy (Sukma, 2023; Yaumi et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2019).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze Indonesia's development diplomacy strategy in responding to the competition between the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), as well as to evaluate how the integrated framework of complex interdependence, weaponized interdependence, and active hedging explains Indonesia's policy behavior in the post-2025 geopolitical context. This article argues that Indonesia adopts an active hedging strategy embedded within structures of complex interdependence. Indonesia strategically diversifies development partnerships through ASEAN, G20, BRICS+, BRI, and PGII in order to maximize development opportunities while minimizing geopolitical vulnerabilities and asymmetric dependency. In this context, Indonesia's free and active foreign policy functions not only as a normative doctrine, but also as a strategic instrument for navigating contemporary great power competition.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative approach using a comparative case study design to analyze Indonesia's development diplomacy strategy amid the competition between the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII). To maintain analytical focus, this study examines three selected cases: (1) Indonesia's participation in BRI infrastructure projects during 2020–2025; (2) Indonesia's involvement in PGII initiatives through JETP and IPEF; and (3) Indonesia's role in ASEAN and G20 development diplomacy frameworks. These cases were selected because they represent Indonesia's engagement with both China-led and Western-led development architectures while reflecting Indonesia's strategy to maintain strategic autonomy.

Data collection was conducted through qualitative document analysis. Primary data consisted of official policy documents, including Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs policy statements, the 2025–2029 RPJMN, ASEAN Secretariat reports, G20 communiqués, and BRICS+ official documents. Secondary data included academic journal articles, reports from the World Bank, ADB, and OECD, as well as verified international media reports relevant to Indonesia's development diplomacy.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, data categorization was used to identify policy patterns and diplomatic strategies related to BRI and PGII engagement. Second, process tracing was applied to examine the relationship between structural pressures and Indonesia's policy responses. Third, the findings were interpreted using an integrated analytical framework combining complex interdependence, weaponized interdependence, and active hedging theories. Internal validity was strengthened through source triangulation, while the analysis was limited to the Southeast Asian context to avoid excessive generalization.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1. The Architecture of Global Development Competition 2025: Structural Context**

By 2025, the architecture of global development will be marked by three interrelated structural shifts.

First, the fragmentation of the Bretton Woods multilateral financial system through the emergence of alternative institutions New Development Bank (NDB), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and Quota Reserve Arrangement (CRA) which is mostly under the influence of China and the BRICS countries (World Bank, 2025).

Second, the polarization between the two development coalitions: the development finance architecture of the West led by the United States through the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), the Development Finance Corporation (DFC), and the Blue Dot Network; and the development architecture led by China through the Belt and Road

Initiative (BRI), the AIIB, and the Silk Road Fund. These two architectures compete not only in financial quantity, but also in regulatory standards, labor requirements, and attached governance values.

Third, accelerating the energy transition as a new field of competition. Initiatives Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) offered by the Western coalition to Indonesia worth USD 20 billion is a strategic instrument as well as a significant potential conditionality for domestic energy policy. On the other hand, China offers green energy packages through BRI Green Development Coalition without comparable normative conditionality (Asian Development Bank, 2025).

**Table 1. Comparison of BRI and PGII Development Architecture to Indonesia**

Dimensions	BRI (China)	PGII (United States)
Investment Volume	USD 1+ trillion globally (2013–2025)	USD 600 billion target 2027
Sector Focus	Physical, energy, digital infrastructure	Clean energy, critical infrastructure, digital
Conditionality	Low (non-interference)	High (governance standards, environment)
Platform	AIIB, Silk Road Fund, NDB	DFC, Blue Dot Network, JETP
Indonesia's Response	Selective: KCJB, Patimban Port	Active: IPEF, JETP, PGII Digital

Source: Processed from the World Bank (2025), Asian Development Bank (2025), and Radhiansyah et al. (2023).

### 3.2. Indonesia's Active Hedging Posture : Empirical Evidence

Policy analysis shows that Indonesia consistently implements an active hedging strategy in development diplomacy. This can be seen in several recurring policy patterns.

- a. Dual Engagement without Exclusivity. Indonesia accepts BRI's investment in the Jakarta–Bandung High Speed Train project (which will be fully operational from 2024), while actively participating in Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and become a partner of PGII in digital connectivity projects. This pattern is consistent with Kuik's argument about active hedging as a strategy to maximize the benefits of both sides without being tied to one orbit (Kuik, 2021).
- b. Multilateral Pivoting. Indonesia uses multilateral forums as a space to negotiate a more equal position. In the G20, Indonesia has succeeded in placing the issue of debt restructuring for developing countries As a priority agenda, an interest that is transversal and does not take sides with any bloc. This strategy strengthens Indonesia's legitimacy as a Swing State that have bargaining value on both sides (Radhiansyah et al., 2023).
- c. Normative Framing through AOIP. Indonesia uses the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as a normative framework to manage engagement with development initiatives of major powers. The AOIP effectively affirms the principle of ASEAN centrality that must be respected by all external initiatives including BRI and PGII thereby giving Indonesia and ASEAN significant collective bargaining space.

### 3.3. Analysis through a Complex Interdependency Lens

The complex interdependence framework provides significant clarity, but it is not entirely adequate in explaining Indonesia's strategy (Keohane & Nye, 1977). In terms of multiple channels, this framework is very relevant, because Indonesia operates simultaneously through government-to-government (G2G), business-to-business (B2B), and people-to-people (P2P) channels in its development relations with China and the United States. This diversity of channels creates a complex network of dependencies that are not easily broken by a single geopolitical maneuver.

However, in the absence of hierarchy of issues, the reality of 2025 presents a more complex dynamic. Security issues, especially the South China Sea, and development issues cannot always be strictly separated. China leverages infrastructure access through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as Leverage territorial issues, while the United States links Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) with a technological security agenda. Under these conditions, complex interdependence models need to be modified to accommodate potential weaponization of interdependence (Farrell & Newman, 2019).

The most fundamental weakness of this framework is its inability to explain the dimensions of identity and norms. The question of why Indonesia consistently prioritizes the principle of Non-interference and anti-conditionality in South-South development cooperation cannot be adequately answered. The framework of complex interdependence rooted in

the assumption of rational actors does not yet have sufficient analytical tools to explain such normative commitments, so the constructivist approach becomes a necessary complement (Wendt, 1999).

### **3.4. Implications for the South-South Cooperation Framework**

The findings of this study have important implications for the development of the study South-South Cooperation (SSC). Mawdsley argues that SSC is not just a development practice, but also a Counter-Hegemonic Project that challenge Western development norms (Mawdsley, 2023). In this context, Indonesia is in an ambivalent position: on the one hand it prioritizes the principles of SSC (equality, non-conditionality, and national ownership), but on the other hand remains actively involved in the North-South development architecture through Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP).

This ambivalence, which at first glance appears to be an inconsistency, actually reflects the rational practice of active hedging, in which Indonesia seeks to maintain access to various sources of development financing. However, these normative tensions need to be managed carefully so as not to reduce Indonesia's credibility as an SSC champion in international forums.

### **3.5. The Dynamics of BRICS+ Accession and Implications for Indonesia's Development Diplomacy**

#### **3.5.1. Indonesia's Accession to BRICS+: Context and Significance**

Indonesia's accession to BRICS+ in 2025 marks a significant new chapter in Indonesia's development diplomacy trajectory. This decision cannot be separated from the context of the transformation of the increasingly multipolar international financial architecture, where BRICS+ has grown into a coalition that represents more than 40 percent of global GDP and about 45 percent of the world's population (World Bank, 2025).

From perspective strategic calculation, accession to BRICS+ provides a number of concrete advantages for Indonesia. First, wider access to New Development Bank (NDB) as an alternative source of financing infrastructure that does not bring political conditionality such as the Bretton Woods institution. Second, an increase in bargaining positions in international financial system reform negotiations, especially regarding the representation of Global South countries in the IMF and World Bank. Third, strengthening diplomatic networks with fellow developing countries in the face of pressure from major powers (Radhiansyah et al., 2023).

However, this accession also presents challenges that cannot be ignored. The main concern is the emergence of a perception that Indonesia has "chosen sides" in the rivalry between the United States and China, which has the potential to undermine Indonesia's principle of free activity and hedging capabilities. In anticipation of this, the Indonesian government has consistently emphasized that BRICS+ membership is complementary and not a substitute for Indonesia's commitments in the G20, ASEAN, and Western-based multilateral forums.

#### **3.5.2. BRICS+ as a Global Financial Architecture Reform Platform**

One of Indonesia's main agendas in BRICS+ is to encourage more inclusive and representative reform of the international financial system. In this case, Indonesia is positioned as a bridge (Bridge Builder) between the interests of the Global South countries that want gradual de-dollarization and the importance of maintaining the stability of the global financial system which remains necessary for sustainable development (Scott, 2025).

It is important to note that Indonesia is not a radical de-dollarization. On the other hand, Indonesia supports currency diversification in bilateral trade as well as strengthening the role of Special Drawing Rights (SDR) in the international monetary system, a moderate position that reflects Indonesia's need to retain access to dollar-dominated global capital markets (Asian Development Bank, 2025).

In this context, Indonesia's strategy in BRICS+ can be understood as an expression of complex interdependence in the financial dimension, namely leveraging layered membership to create alternative financing options while maintaining access to the Western-based global financial system.

### **3.6. ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and the ASEAN Collective Architecture**

#### **3.6.1. AOIP as a Collective Active Hedging Instrument**

ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which was adopted at the ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in 2019 and strengthened through Indonesia's Chairmanship 2023, represents ASEAN's collective efforts in responding to geopolitical pressure from major powers while maintaining the principle of ASEAN centrality. For Indonesia, the AOIP serves as an

instrument of multilateralization strategy active hedging national, i.e. transforming unilateral policy choices into regional norms that have collective legitimacy (Admiral, 2023).

The four priority areas of AOIP maritime cooperation, connectivity, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and economy were strategically chosen because they are non-confrontational and able to be a platform for engagement for various parties. The United States can participate through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and the Blue Dot Network, while China through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). This design reflects the logic of complex interdependence, where development issues are made the main agenda so as to open up space for constructive involvement from all parties.

### **3.6.2. ASEAN Institutional Limitations and Strengthening Efforts**

However, the effectiveness of AOIP as an instrument Hedging collectively it is still constrained by a number of long-identified ASEAN institutional weaknesses. Principle Non-interference and consensus mechanisms that require unanimity often hinder ASEAN from responding in a timely and decisive manner to dynamic geopolitical pressures (Admiral, 2023).

In the context of increasingly intensifying great power competition, Indonesia has sought to push for the renewal of ASEAN's decision-making mechanism through the minus X formula concept, which allows a group of ASEAN countries to move forward without having to wait for full consensus. Although it has not been formally institutionalized, this discourse reflects Indonesia's awareness of the importance of increasing ASEAN's agility in dealing with contemporary geopolitical dynamics.

In addition, Indonesia also encourages the strengthening of the ASEAN Infrastructure Fund (AIF) and the ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility (ACGF) as collective development financing instruments that can reduce the dependence of individual ASEAN member countries on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII). Through strengthening this collective financial capacity, Indonesia seeks to increase the region's bargaining power in negotiating with external powers.

## **3.7. The Domestic Dimension of Indonesia's Development Diplomacy**

### **3.7.1. Policy Coherence: The Challenge of Cross-Ministerial Coordination**

One of the biggest challenges in strategy implementation active hedging Indonesia is ensuring coherence between various ministries and institutions involved in development diplomacy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bappenas, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of SOEs, and BKPM have often different perspectives and interests in evaluating development projects involving foreign partners (Muradi, 2024).

For example, in the case of KCJB, there is tension between the interests of the Ministry of SOEs who want maximum technology transfer from China and the interests of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who want to ensure that involvement in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) does not compromise Indonesia's position on sensitive issues such as the South China Sea. Similar tensions also emerged in the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) negotiations, in which the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and the Ministry of Finance had differences in the conditionality risk assessment attached by a coalition of Western countries.

In this context, the institutionalization of a stronger cross-ministerial coordination mechanism is an urgent need. One model worth considering is the establishment of the Development Diplomacy Council, which is a cabinet-level coordination council that integrates diplomatic, development, and financial perspectives in formulating Indonesia's response to various offers of development cooperation from major powers.

### **3.7.2. The Role of Non-State Actors in Development Diplomacy**

The framework of complex interdependencies underscores the importance of multiple channels that go beyond intergovernmental relations. In the Indonesian context, non-state actors including the private sector, think tanks, diaspora, and civil society organizations are playing an increasingly significant role in shaping and implementing the development diplomacy agenda.

The Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KADIN), for example, has become an important actor in facilitating the involvement of the Indonesian private sector in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) ecosystems. Meanwhile, study institutions such as the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Indonesia play a role in providing policy analysis that supports bilateral development cooperation negotiations. The people-to-people dimension put forward by Keohane and Nye is also reflected in the role of

the Indonesian diaspora in international academic and business networks that connect Indonesia with the global innovation ecosystem.

The integration of these non-state actors into a more formal framework of development diplomacy is still an area that needs to be strengthened. The experience of countries such as South Korea and Singapore in integrating private-sector-based economic diplomacy into national foreign policy strategies can be an important reference for Indonesia.

### 3.8. Theoretical Evaluation: The Capacity and Limitations of the Analytical Framework

**Table 2. Evaluation of Theoretical Framework in Explaining Indonesia's Development Diplomacy**

Theoretical Framework	Aspects Explained	Limitations	Relevance for Indonesia
Complex Interdependencies	Multiple channels, non-hierarchical issues, strategic flexibility	Not explaining the dimensions of norms and identities	High for structural analysis of dependencies
Weaponized Interdependence	Coercion risk through economic networks	Too state-centric, less attention to agency	Medium-high for technology and digital issues
Active Hedging	The strategy of the middle country in the great power rivalry	Lack of explanation of domestic factors	Very high for Indonesia's foreign policy
Constructivism	Identity, norms, and policy ideology	Lack of precision in empirical predictions	Height for South–South dimensions

Source: Author's synthesis based on Keohane & Nye (1977), Farrell & Newman (2019), Kuik (2021), and Wendt (1999).

From the evaluation table above, it is clear that there is no single theoretical framework that is able to comprehensively explain the complexity of Indonesia's development diplomacy. Indonesia's active hedging strategy is multidimensional, including structural dimensions (explained by complex interdependence), riskized interdependence, strategic dimension (hedging theory), and normative dimension (constructivism). Therefore, the study of Indonesia's development diplomacy requires a theoretical approach that is integrative and eclectic, not monistic.

### 4. Conclusion

This article shows that Indonesia's post-2025 development diplomacy is characterized by a systematic active hedging strategy through dual engagement, multilateral pivoting, and normative framing based on AOIP and the principle of free and active. The complex interdependence framework explains the flexibility of this strategy, but it needs to be complemented by the concepts of weaponized interdependence and constructivism to understand the dimensions of risk, norms, and identities. Indonesia's accession to BRICS+ in 2025 is a concrete manifestation of this strategy in expanding diplomatic and financial options. Its success depends on Indonesia's ability to maintain credibility and normative consistency as a principled actor.

The policy implications suggest that Indonesia needs to strengthen cross-ministerial coordination, optimize the AOIP as an ASEAN collective platform, and increase analytical capacity to anticipate the risk of weaponization in interdependence, especially in the digital and energy sectors. In addition, BRICS+ membership should be proactively leveraged to drive more inclusive reform of the global financial architecture. In the future, research needs to deepen the domestic dimension, including the influence of internal interests and political dynamics, as well as conduct comparative studies with other ASEAN countries such as Vietnam and Malaysia.

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