

Indonesia's Strategy in Maritime Infrastructure Development Through China's BRI

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Abstrak

This paper discusses Indonesia's strategy and initiative in maritime infrastructure development through cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) initiated by China. Maritime infrastructure development is a key component of Indonesia's vision as a Global Maritime Fulcrum, aimed at enhancing regional and global connectivity. Cooperation with BRI includes the construction and modernization of shipping routes, ports, and logistics facilities designed to accelerate goods flow, reduce logistics costs, and improve trade efficiency. Additionally, this strategic partnership is expected to attract foreign investment, stimulate economic growth, and create jobs. By utilizing China's technology, funding, and expertise, Indonesia seeks to strengthen its position in the global supply chain and achieve inclusive and sustainable national development. This research highlights the importance of international collaboration in realizing resilient infrastructure development and its impact on economic growth and societal welfare.

Keywords: *belt and road initiative, global maritime fulcrum, Indonesia-China cooperation, maritime infrastructure development*

Introduction

Indonesia's geographical positioning as an archipelagic nation, comprising over 17,000 islands, provides it with significant maritime potential (Ali & Sulistiyono, 2020). Historically, the nation has served as a pivotal trade center and shipping route in Southeast Asia, a legacy that dates back to the Majapahit Kingdom from the 13th to the 16th centuries (Ampun et al., 2023). During the Dutch colonial period, Indonesia was referred to as the "Netherlands Indies" or Dutch East Indies, functioning as a crucial trade hub linking Europe and Asia. Key ports such as Batavia (now Jakarta), Semarang, Surabaya, and Makassar were instrumental in facilitating this trade (Connelly, 2015).

Following its independence in 1945, the Indonesian government acknowledged the importance of maritime resources as a strategic national asset, prioritizing the development of maritime infrastructure within its national agenda (Santoso & Nafisah, 2018). To enhance the marine and fisheries sectors, the government has continuously invested in improving fishing infrastructure, ports, and supporting facilities. This commitment is encapsulated in the Indonesian Maritime Policy, which aims to position Indonesia as the Global Maritime Fulcrum. The Indonesian Maritime Policy Action Plan for 2016-2019, established under

Presidential Regulation No. 16 of 2017, emphasizes the need for sustainable and integrated implementation of maritime programs aligned with national development goals. This framework extends to the Indonesian Maritime Policy Action Plan for 2021-2025, as outlined in Presidential Regulation No. 34 of 2022 (Masilamani, 2019).

The development of robust maritime infrastructure is critical for enhancing trade routes and boosting productivity in distribution processes, thereby fostering trade growth (Prasetyo et al., 2023). Given that approximately 90% of global trade routes traverse maritime paths, with around 40% passing through Indonesian waters, the significance of infrastructure development cannot be overstated (Adi, 2018). The Indonesian Maritime Policy serves as a comprehensive framework guiding the implementation of maritime initiatives across various governmental levels, aiming to realize the vision of the Global Maritime Fulcrum (Anwar, 2020).

Moreover, the collaboration between Indonesia and China in maritime infrastructure projects has become increasingly prominent. China is actively involved in developing maritime transport infrastructure in strategic Indonesian locations, including the construction of piers and shipping networks to enhance inter-island connectivity (Tantahara & Midhio, 2023). With China's technical and financial support, Indonesia aims to expand its sea transport network, thereby improving access to remote areas and stimulating regional economic growth. This partnership also encompasses technology transfer and capacity building in the maritime sector, with notable projects such as the development of Bitung Port in North Sulawesi and Kuala Tanjung Port in North Sumatra, aimed at increasing cargo handling capacity and improving logistics (Saefullah, 2021).

Indonesia's strategic maritime initiatives, supported by international partnerships and a focus on infrastructure development, are essential for realizing its vision as a global maritime power. Continuous efforts to strengthen regulations and oversight of these projects will ensure that the benefits of such cooperation are balanced and sustainable for both Indonesia and its partners (Syahrin, 2018). Hence, the question is what are Indonesia's strategies and efforts in developing maritime infrastructure through the BRI framework?

Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive methodology to gather data on phenomena that occurred during the research period. This descriptive approach is designed to depict the variables, symptoms, or conditions as they are. Therefore, the data obtained from this research is expected to improve the current situation during the implementation of the research. Descriptive research has characteristics where data is obtained from a single source or standard using observation or survey methods. Descriptive research is used to delve into an issue by explaining several variables in line with the case and the research subject. Hence, descriptive research does not require hypothesis testing.

The author used qualitative data analysis methods. Qualitative analysis in this study focuses on understanding the distinctive characteristics of a group of people, events, or

objects. Qualitative analysis relates to the process from conceptualization and results in the development of a classification framework. The qualitative analysis technique was chosen by the researcher to obtain information that helps the research be established as supplementary material and the design used to describe Indonesia's Strategy in Maritime Infrastructure Development Through China's BRI.

The author used the library research method. This technique involves analyzing data sources to be processed and presented in the form of library research information on various issues needed. This research will be supported by a comprehensive literature review from related literature and with the assistance of several supporting applications such as Mendeley, Harzing, Perish, and Nvivo 14, relevant to the research topic.

Indonesia's Maritime Infrastructure Development

As a maritime and archipelago country, Indonesia has vast seas, and most of its territory consists of water. Indonesia is an archipelago with more than 13,000 islands, covering a sea area of 58 million square kilometers. Its coastline, stretching 95,181 kilometers, is one of the longest in the world. Indonesia's location between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and the Asian and Australian continents offers significant geographic advantages. This positioning allows for substantial shipping activity in Indonesia, if optimized. However, the vast sea area and Indonesia's geographic shape clearly highlight the importance of maritime activities (Nawir et al. 2024). Indonesia's fishing, transportation, and tourism sectors contribute 22% of GDP. The country's extensive coastline offers tremendous opportunities for the development of ports and shipping activities. Indonesia is rich in marine resources, including oil, natural gas, and fish, providing vast opportunities for the growth of the fisheries and energy industries. Additionally, the beautiful islands can be ideal locations for various water sports. Overall, Indonesia's geographic position presents immense potential for expanding and developing its economy in the maritime sector (Sarjito 2023).

The government has allocated significant resources to modernizing and expanding key ports due to the importance of superior maritime infrastructure. This step not only aims to streamline logistics and goods flows but also to boost economic and trade growth. Upgrading and expanding port facilities in Indonesia will enable the country to build closer business relationships with its trading partners. It also affects critical elements such as effective port management, the use of modern navigation technologies, and the application of more advanced technology (Nawir et al., 2024). President Joko Widodo is committed to enhancing maritime infrastructure and connectivity through the development of maritime tolls, sea ports, the logistics industry, shipping, and the maritime tourism industry. To become a global maritime fulcrum, Indonesia must possess world-class port construction and design capabilities, as well as an international-grade fleet. Thus, the existence of ports and supporting infrastructure will have a direct impact on the economic aspects of Indonesian society. Given this situation, the Indonesian government is committed to catching up with its infrastructure development. One of Indonesia's foreign policy strategies to achieve maritime infrastructure progress is by joining China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Maura 2021).

The Belt and Road

The BRI is a global economic development concept initiated by the Chinese government. This concept includes China's strategy to develop an extensive infrastructure network. The term "Belt" refers to land infrastructure development, while "Road" refers to the development of maritime route facilities. Both routes generally connect China with regions in Asia, Africa, and Europe. The main focus of BRI infrastructure projects includes port construction, railways, bridges, highways, and other infrastructures (He 2019).

The BRI consists of two main components: the Economic Silk Road and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The first is a land route connecting China with various locations in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Russia, and Europe. The second is a sea route linking China's coastline with various locations in the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, East Africa, and Europe. The BRI is inspired by the ancient Silk Road, which existed for over 2,000 years, especially during the Han Dynasty, connecting China with the Mediterranean through Eurasia (Octorifadli 2021).

According to the cooperation agreement between the Indonesian and Chinese governments in 2018, Indonesia's national interest in the BRI is to advocate for the vision of the Global Maritime Fulcrum (PMD). In the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed, Indonesia expressed support for China's initiative to jointly develop the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, known as the Belt and Road Initiative, along with Indonesia's vision of PMD. The MoU also states that BRI cooperation between Indonesia and China will involve other countries interested in supporting the BRI and PMD. The primary goal of this cooperation is to achieve the development of a community with a shared future for humanity. China, which responded positively to Indonesia's PMD vision unveiled by President Joko Widodo, sees Indonesia as a strategic partner in the context of the BRI (Iskandar 2022).

With the largest territory and strategic location for global trade in Southeast Asia, Indonesia occupies a crucial position in the Indo-Pacific and South China Sea regions, where the United States and China vie for influence. This position makes Indonesia a key player in regional trade and geopolitics. Moreover, Indonesia's abundant natural resources, both on land and at sea, are essential factors in this cooperation. China needs commodities such as mining products, marine goods, coffee, and palm oil (CPO) that are abundant in Indonesia. Through the BRI, China gains easier and more efficient access to these resources, while Indonesia can leverage Chinese investments and technology to accelerate its infrastructure and economic development (Iskandar 2022).

This cooperation includes infrastructure projects such as port construction, toll roads, and railway networks aimed at improving connectivity and logistics efficiency in Indonesia. This infrastructure upgrade not only supports trade and investment but also creates jobs and improves the welfare of local communities. Thus, the BRI and PMD are mutually supportive and provide significant benefits for both countries. China gains access to vital resources and large markets, while Indonesia accelerates infrastructure modernization and strengthens its

role as a global maritime hub. This cooperation ultimately contributes to the development of a better and more sustainable future for humanity (Iskandar 2022).

Some Challenges

Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), supported by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Indonesian government has the opportunity to secure investment for maritime infrastructure development. China offers highly favorable deals, covering approximately 90% of the infrastructure project costs in Indonesia (Suropati, Sulaiman & Montratama, 2016). Investments from the BRI are expected to help President Jokowi realize the Global Maritime Fulcrum vision. To finance infrastructure development from 2015 to 2019, the Indonesian government required a total of Rp. 4.796 trillion. However, the funds provided by BRI through AIIB could serve as an additional financial source for Indonesia, given that the state and regional budgets (APBN and APBD) can only cover around 40% of the total costs (Iskandar, 2022 et al.).

Maritime port infrastructure and shipping routes are expected to enhance maritime connectivity. In the 21st century, Maritime Silk Road Ports have become hubs for cargo and passenger ship transportation, as well as human resources. The Maritime Silk Road includes a variety of infrastructure projects, including the development of Kuala Tanjung Port in North Sumatra and Bitung Port in North Sulawesi, Indonesia. The main purpose of these infrastructure developments, especially outside Java, is to improve the national economy. One of the additional investment projects through the BRI involves the development of sea routes. This initiative aims to reduce domestic trade logistics costs across the country, ensuring that basic needs are met equitably nationwide (Lesmana 2023 et al.).

One of the maritime infrastructure projects in Indonesia supported by China's BRI is the development of Bitung Port in North Sulawesi, the largest port in the province. Bitung Port is frequently visited by large passenger ships from Indonesia. This is because the BRI initiative to invest in North Sulawesi can attract China due to the port's strategic location and its high economic and geostrategic value. Bitung Port has been designated as a Special Economic Zone (KEK) (Siswoyo, 2019). For each infrastructure development or expansion project, in addition to relying on state and regional budgets, foreign investment plans are also necessary. In some cases, foreign capital often plays a larger role. President Joko Widodo, during a meeting with Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in China, stated that China is one of the investors and lenders under the BRI initiative. President Jokowi specifically requested cooperation with President Xi Jinping and the Chinese government for three major projects under China's BRI program: Bitung Toll Road, Bitung Port, and an airport in North Sulawesi. The Bitung and Kuala Tanjung Ports will be developed into international ports.

There are four main reasons why Bitung Port is being developed as an international port from a geostrategic perspective for Indonesia: 1) Its location offers a short travel route between Indonesia and countries in the Indo-Pacific region; 2) It serves as a source of national income; 3) Bitung Port has adaptive and competitive characteristics compared to other ports;

and 4) It acts as a feeder that positively impacts the geostrategic activities of the port (Salim 2014 et al.).

The short distance to Indo-Pacific countries is one of the primary reasons for Indonesia's port growth, attracting many nations to collaborate on export and import activities. For example, Indonesia imports ceramics from Shanghai, China. Additionally, Indonesia is increasingly intensifying its exports to other countries, such as Hong Kong. From North Sulawesi, Indonesia exports frozen fish, marble, and seaweed to Hong Kong, as well as cocoa beans, seaweed, and wooden toys to Yokohama (Amaliyah 2023).

International-class port management becomes the reference point in supporting industrial and economic activities. To support port development, management must be carried out thoroughly and efficiently. The government has established the National Logistics System Blueprint (Silognas) as part of the Master Plan for the Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesia's Economic Development (MP3EI) and the maritime concept (Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs, 2009), with the development and management of Kuala Tanjung Port as an International Hub Port. Kuala Tanjung Port is located along the Maritime Silk Road, considered one of the busiest trade routes in the world. The Strait of Malacca is a strategic route for maritime economic activities. Due to its location, it is expected to have a significant impact on economic growth and the progress of Kuala Tanjung Port. Kuala Tanjung Port was selected as a hub due to the demand and opportunities offered by the main shipping lanes. The development of Kuala Tanjung Port as an international hub is likely to face competition with surrounding ports (Adnyahayu 2022).

Indonesia's policy to revive its maritime glory requires specific strategies, including enhancing its naval fleet, developing infrastructure, and managing marine resources. The concept of Indonesia as a Global Maritime Fulcrum has been popularized again, with the government committing to strengthening connectivity, improving maritime security, and promoting regional cooperation in managing marine resources. President Jokowi's vision of Indonesia as a Global Maritime Fulcrum includes elements such as maritime culture and infrastructure. In economic diplomacy, Indonesia has become the focus of China through the BRI project. Indonesia was selected due to its large economy in Southeast Asia and its natural resource potential, despite its still-limited infrastructure. China is interested in investing in Indonesia due to its need for natural resources and its significant economic strength. Maritime relations between the two countries have grown stronger, with China supporting Indonesia's maritime strategy as a response to Indonesia's support for China's similar strategy.

BRI and Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a long-term economic development plan proposed by China, focusing on trade, infrastructure, and regional connectivity. The project aims to connect China with Europe through Central Asia, West Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Under the leadership of President Joko Widodo, who promotes the Global Maritime Fulcrum or Global Maritime Axis program, Indonesia seeks to enhance domestic connectivity. This opens up cooperation opportunities with China through the BRI,

encouraging investment and partnership. President Joko Widodo emphasized the Global Maritime Fulcrum vision as the foundation of Indonesia's development policy during his leadership. The awareness of Indonesia's potential as a major maritime nation, which had not been fully realized, became evident. In the past, national policies tended to overlook the potential of the sea. Through the Global Maritime Fulcrum, President Jokowi is committed to shifting the development paradigm, recognizing the sea as a source of life and a means to improve people's welfare (Marsetio, 2018).

Investment in Indonesia's infrastructure sector is part of China's efforts to realize the BRI initiative. Although China is not the only country investing in Indonesia, Chinese capital has had a significant impact on infrastructure development. These infrastructure improvements, in turn, will help strengthen Indonesia's economy. According to the National Economic and Industrial Committee (KEIN), BRI projects should be optimally utilized to support Indonesia's economic growth. The BRI should be seen as an opportunity for Indonesia to balance its trade with China. Data from the Ministry of Industry shows that Indonesia's trade balance with China has faced an increasing deficit over the past eight years. In 2017, the trade deficit reached US\$1.088 billion, a 20% reduction compared to the previous year. Therefore, Indonesia needs to wisely leverage the BRI, including creating opportunities to reduce its trade deficit with China, for example, through the establishment of free trade zones (Bu'ulolo, 2022).

Indonesia's participation in the BRI holds significant relevance for its national interests. President Jokowi clearly identifies that Indonesia's involvement in the BRI is not only to gain direct economic benefits but also as an integral part of a larger vision to elevate Indonesia's position as the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF), which aligns with the Global Maritime Axis concept. The Global Maritime Fulcrum concept refers to Indonesia's vision of becoming a strategic maritime power in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Therefore, Indonesia's participation in the BRI can strengthen its position as a major power in the Indo-Pacific region. Jokowi sees the BRI and the Global Maritime Fulcrum concept as complementary and mutually reinforcing, rather than as competitors or challenges to Indonesia's ambitions (Rencana Aksi Kebijakan Kelautan Indonesia Tahun 2021-2025, 2022).

In President Jokowi's view, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Maritime Fulcrum concept are not only complementary but also mutually supportive. By forging close partnerships with countries involved in the BRI, Indonesia can expand its network of economic and infrastructure cooperation, ultimately supporting its vision to become a global maritime hub. Indonesia's involvement in the BRI is not just an economic strategy but also a significant step in strengthening its geopolitical position in the Indo-Pacific region. Jokowi's vision of Indonesia as a maritime nation emphasizes the importance of connecting the scattered islands through regular maritime services. This is the first and most fundamental step in strengthening national integration and expanding Indonesia's connectivity with other countries around the world (Maura 2021).

A more integrated and efficient sea transportation system will allow Indonesia to fully capitalize on its trade potential and diplomatic relations at the international level. Strong

maritime infrastructure will improve access to goods and services, accelerate trade flows, and enhance Indonesia's competitiveness in the global market. Furthermore, by strengthening maritime connectivity, Indonesia can also increase stability and security in the Indo-Pacific region. A more active and integrated Indonesian presence in the global trade network will strengthen its strategic position and enable the country to play a larger role in shaping economic and security policies in the region.

In addition, improving maritime infrastructure will support the development of other sectors such as tourism, fisheries, and energy. This will create new jobs, improve the welfare of the people, and strengthen the national economy as a whole. Thus, Jokowi's vision of Indonesia as a strong and connected maritime nation not only takes into account economic and trade aspects but also fosters sustainable and inclusive development that benefits all Indonesians (Maura 2021).

Indonesia encounters numerous challenges in its pursuit of the Global Maritime Fulcrum vision, particularly in the context of cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). One of the primary concerns is the rapid pace of infrastructure development associated with the BRI, which raises significant sustainability issues. Environmental sustainability emerges as a critical challenge, particularly in regions where port and maritime projects exert substantial ecological impacts. The extensive scale of these initiatives necessitates comprehensive environmental assessments to mitigate potential harm to marine ecosystems and local biodiversity. It is imperative for Indonesia to ensure that the advancement of its maritime infrastructure is congruent with environmental sustainability objectives (Ali & Sulistiyono, 2020).

Financial sustainability represents another substantial hurdle. While Chinese investments through the BRI cover a considerable portion of project costs, Indonesia must exercise caution regarding potential debt dependency. It is essential to ensure the financial viability of infrastructure projects and to avoid imposing long-term financial burdens that could jeopardize Indonesia's economic stability. Implementing clear regulations and robust risk management strategies is vital to minimize the risks associated with BRI projects (Ampun et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the integration of local communities into the development process is crucial. Engaging local stakeholders in decision-making is essential to guarantee that the benefits of these projects are equitably distributed. Community involvement fosters a sense of ownership, which is vital for the long-term success and sustainability of infrastructure initiatives (Connelly, 2015). Addressing these challenges—environmental sustainability, financial viability, and community engagement—will be pivotal for Indonesia as it seeks to realize its Global Maritime Fulcrum vision through collaboration under the BRI framework.

Conclusion

Indonesia's geographical advantages as an archipelago, coupled with its rich historical legacy as a trading powerhouse, position it uniquely within the maritime domain. The

commitment to developing robust maritime infrastructure through strategic partnerships, notably with China's Belt and Road Initiative, demonstrates Indonesia's vision of becoming a Global Maritime Fulcrum. The ongoing upgrades to ports and logistics facilities, alongside technology transfers and capacity-building efforts, are set to significantly enhance Indonesia's role in regional and global trade networks. However, for this ambitious vision to be realized, a careful balance must be struck between sustainable development and economic growth, ensuring that the benefits of such partnerships are equitably distributed among all stakeholders.

As Indonesia navigates the complexities of maritime development, there is ample scope for future research agendas. Areas for exploration could include the socio-economic impacts of infrastructure projects on local communities, examining how these developments influence regional inequalities. Additionally, studies could focus on the effectiveness of technology transfer initiatives in strengthening Indonesia's maritime capabilities. Another vital avenue could involve assessing the environmental implications of extensive maritime infrastructure development, ensuring that economic ambitions do not come at the cost of ecological sustainability. Finally, comparative studies between Indonesia and other countries engaged in similar partnerships within the BRI framework could yield valuable insights into best practices and lessons learned. Such research would not only contribute to academic discourse but also inform policymakers in crafting strategies that promote both national development and global cooperation.

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