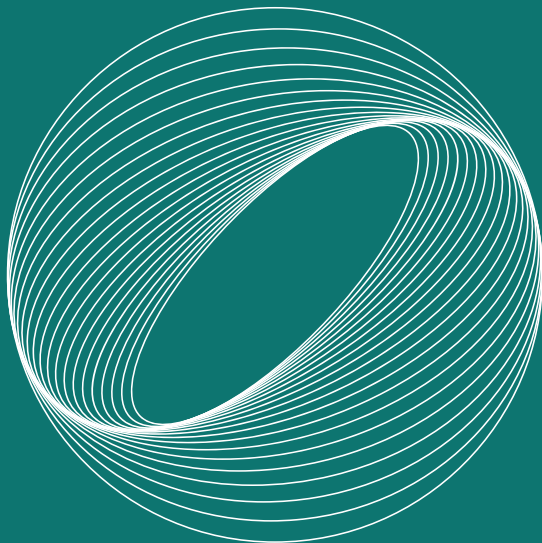




Institute of  
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DEPT. OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY



# ***FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW #68***

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## THE INDONESIAN STRATEGY AMID THE SINO-AMERICAN GEOPOLITICAL TURBULENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Escalating tensions mark the relationship between the US and China. The United States is the strongest sovereign power due to its long history of maintaining stable economic regions. Yet, China's power is growing (Joshua, 2024). China's remarkable expansion has persuaded Western nations that China's ascent to global superpower status is imminent (Xia, 2018). Considering Southeast Asia's economic clout and advantageous position, US-China competition has escalated in the region (Parameswaran, 2023). Given that Southeast Asia is "where the superpowers meet," the states in the region must play a tricky balancing act (Ba, 2023).

Being an emerging power in the Southeast Asian region (Abbondanza, 2022), Indonesia is bound to be reached by this geopolitical unrest. Indonesia's advancing economic power and history of leadership appear to have destined it to be a strategic pivot. In this light, Indonesia has established an agenda of regional order centered on preventing big powers from gaining hegemony over the area, pursuing strategic liberty, and upholding legitimacy at home. Take, for instance, Indonesia's close relations to ASEAN and how ASEAN is the country's main tool for strategic engagement. With time, ASEAN evolved into both a strategic shield against great-power politics and an extension of Indonesia's aspirations regionally and globally (Laksmana, 2021). Amidst the US and China competition, Indonesia seems adept at strategically positioning itself to seek advantages (Muhammad, 2023). Driven by the ASEAN-China FTA and a bilateral comprehensive strategic alliance, China is Indonesia's largest trading partner, accounting for more than 25% of the country's total international commerce, valued at US\$70 billion by 2020 (Abbondanza, 2022). Furthermore, US-Indonesia military ties improved, leading to a declaration of a "comprehensive partnership" and "strategic partnership." By 2023, they elevated their connection to a "comprehensive strategic partnership," underscoring America's significance as Indonesia's key ally (US Department of Defense, 2023).

Indonesia's ability to leverage the competition among these major powers demonstrates that Indonesia maintained its "free and active" policy and non-alignment commitment. This approach allows Indonesia to effectively consider both countries in the ongoing rivalry, making the most of its sights to its advantage individually and collaboratively. (Audrey Dayang Abigail Puhuh, HI UGM 21).

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## LAND, LOSS, AND LIBERATION: REPOSITION INDIGENOUS PEOPLES THROUGHOUT THE E-SAK KA OU DECLARATION

In the looming shadows of ecological degradation, Indigenous Peoples find themselves thrust to the forefront. This vulnerability is compounded by their reliance on traditional practices and their often marginalized status, leaving them less equipped to adapt to their surroundings' swift and harsh changes (Grable, 2023). This situation has sparked collective resilience efforts from Indigenous Peoples to reclaim their deprived rights to life and the environment. The following response took place in Asia, where a coalition of Indigenous Communities launched the E-sak Ka Ou Declaration, a reminder of what remains undone toward upholding the rights of Indigenous Communities.

Involving 47 delegates representing Indigenous Peoples and development organizations from 11 countries in Asia, the E-Sak Ka Ou Declaration calls attention to the key role of Indigenous Peoples in (as well as the challenges they face from) climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation programs. The word 'E-sak Ka Ou' means 'gill of the manta ray' and was released ahead of COP28 last year by Asian Indigenous leaders (Tran, 2023). This is a term used by the Urak Lawoi tribe that refers to where their ancestors first established life on Lanta Island in Krabi, Thailand. Krabi Province is also where the E-sak Ka Ou Declaration was drafted in November 2023.

Even though the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which commits nations to halt and reverse the decline of biodiversity by 2030, has been adopted, the E-Sak Ka Ou Declaration notes that national laws and frameworks on protected areas still hold "the colonial legacy of a fortress approach to conservation." These practices largely fail to recognize Indigenous Peoples' ownership of territories and resources (Kusuma, 2024). As a result, they tend to violate Indigenous Peoples' rights, criminalize human rights defenders, and displace Indigenous Communities and their conservation practices. The Declaration might be interpreted as an appeal for acknowledging and safeguarding the rights of Indigenous Peoples, enabling them to fulfill their crucial role in protecting both humanity and the planet, along with preserving their cultural heritage. All in all, E-Sak Ka Ou Declaration highlights the importance of collective resistance coming from Indigenous Peoples, challenges dominant narratives, and signifies that room for transformation still exists. (Muhammad Raafi, HI UGM 2021).

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## **FROM HATE TO HATE: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION ON THE ROHINGYA CRISIS**

Recently, the Rohingya refugee issue has become a prominent theme in social media discussions in Indonesia. However, unlike previous acceptance responses that tended to view the dimension of humanitarian solidarity, narratives have turned to rejection and antagonism. On TikTok, videos with anti-Rohingya sentiments have been widely circulated since late last year, with over 90 million views in November alone (VOA Indonesia, 2024). Additionally, Drone Emprit analysis found disinformation and hate narratives targeting Rohingya refugees intentionally disseminated by fanbase accounts or anonymous accounts (BBC News Indonesia, 2023).

This increase in sentiment is also part of the consequences of the spread of disinformation and hate speech on social media since the Covid-19 crisis in 2020 in Malaysia (Jani, 2024). This disinformation and hatred have seeped into the Indonesian context and further legitimized the spread of hatred and unfounded fears in society. For example, concerns that the acceptance of Rohingya refugees in Indonesia will lead them to boldly demand land as seen in Malaysia, although the issue is actually untrue. Interestingly, this antagonism extends beyond Indonesia; the actions of some Indonesian students who broke into Rohingya refugee temporary shelters in Aceh on 27 December 2023, have been twisted into a narrative in India that the Indonesian government is sending the refugees back to sea. This has garnered significant attention in India (15,200 views and 1,100 likes), with pro-Hindutva accounts filling the comment section suggesting that the Indian government should follow Indonesia's stance in deporting the refugees (Choudhury, 2024).

This highlights the immense power of social media in influencing public opinion. Social media not only facilitates the distribution of disinformation across borders but also amplifies it. The anonymity feature makes users more vocal in expressing their opinions (Rashid & Saidin, 2023), even though the credibility of the information conveyed is uncertain. Moreover, the 'echo chamber' effect, where users are exposed to similar content they like, narrows users' perspectives in understanding an issue, reinforcing sentiments, and creating potential community disintegration. Ultimately, social media becomes a fertile ground for the proliferation of false, manipulative, and logically fallacious information, hate speech, and violence (Amanullah & Dwisusilo, 2019). Differentiating true information becomes increasingly difficult, and truth is no longer determined by the results of rational discursive processes, but by the power to uphold subjective claims (Amanullah & Dwisusilo, 2019). Thus, this underscores the urgency not only to focus on meeting the emergency humanitarian needs of refugees but also to combat the growing campaign of disinformation and hatred. Platform owners must also play a more active role in creating a safe digital ecosystem that does not become a tool for politicizing vulnerable groups. (Devi Lailatul Fitri Angraini, HI UGM 2021).

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