



## Examining Indonesia-Qatar Relations through the Five-Dimensional Framework\*

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### [ *Abstract* ]

In recent decades, Indonesia and the Middle Eastern countries have increased and expanded their political, security, economic, and socio-cultural ties. Qatar is one of the Middle Eastern countries which have fortified ties with Indonesia. This article aims to analyze the nature and scope of Indonesia-Qatar relations through the five-dimensional framework developed by George Eberling, which consists of political-diplomatic, economic-trade, military-security, cultural, and petroleum-energy relations (Eberling 2017). Despite being significantly distinct in history, demography, geographic size, and location, Jakarta and Doha have been provided opportunities to expand their cooperation on multifaceted dimensions by way of common economic, geopolitical, and cultural interests. Throughout the paper, the primary drivers of the cooperation are also discussed, alongside its future prospects.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, Qatar, Asia and the Middle East, the Gulf, GCC

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## **I . Introduction**

Relations between Indonesia and the Middle East have been going on for centuries. Indian Ocean maritime routes between Southeast Asia and the Arab world devised one of the most extensive maritime trade links in the world during the period 1000 to 1500 (Al Qurtuby 2019). Through it, Indonesia and the Middle East have maintained and expanded linkages via numerous platforms such as the hajj pilgrimage, migrant labor, and academic exchange (Lucking 2021). While subsequent years witnessed shifts in the geopolitical dynamics, cooperation saw a downturn as both Indonesia and the Middle East preferred to cooperate with major Western powers and neighboring countries; in the recent years the two have tried to rectify their cooperation (Rakhmat 2022a). Growing regional instability and potential economic downturn in the US and Europe have prompted the countries of the Middle East to initiate a “Look East” policy, deepening ties with Asian nations such China, Japan, South Korea, and the ASEAN countries (Al-Adwani 2020). Indonesia, as the largest economy in Southeast Asia, has enticed Middle Eastern countries to strengthen their footholds. Apart from being enticing destination for investments, the archipelago’s 250-million population makes it a promising market for Arab exports. Its strategic geographic location makes it a gateway to expand Middle Eastern footprint in the wider Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, the Middle East offers Indonesia not only access to untapped consumer markets, but also investment prospects. Despite being the largest Southeast Asian economy, Indonesia still needs to attract massive amounts of investments to develop its economy, accelerate growth, and slash unemployment. Geopolitical rivalry between China and the US, which poses challenges to the Southeast Asian region, also prompted Indonesia to fortify cooperation with other Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East (Rakhmat et al. 2022).

As a result, in recent decades, Indonesia and the Middle Eastern countries increased and expanded political, security, economic, and socio-cultural ties. Indonesia and Qatar present an interesting case study. In line with the above trajectory, the ties between Jakarta and Doha have been developing not only in the

political and diplomatic realms, but also in the economic, security, and cultural sectors. This paper aims to demonstrate the nature and scope of Indonesia-Qatar relations through the five-dimensional framework developed by Eberling (2017), which consists of political-diplomatic relations, economic-trade relations, military-security relations, cultural relations, and petroleum-energy relations. The framework enables this paper to provide a comprehensive understanding of Qatar-Indonesia relations. To date, there are limited studies on Indonesia-Middle East relations. In general, existing literature focus on the influence of the Middle East on Islam in Indonesia (Azra 2004; Eliraz 2004; Hadiz 2015). Works on this topic extend to writings on the rise of Islamic extremism in Indonesia (Hasan 2005; Chaplin 2014; and Kovacs 2014). There is a growing number of works focusing on the bilateral cooperation between Indonesia and the Middle Eastern countries, such as Al Qurtuby and Aldamer (2018) and Rakhmat (2022c) on Indonesia-Saudi Arabia relations, Jensen (2017) and Mason (2022) on Indonesia-UAE relations, and Rakhmat et al. (2021) on Indonesia-Oman relations. This paper thus aims to contribute to the burgeoning literature on the relations between Indonesia and the Middle East by focusing on Indonesia's ties with Qatar.

## **II. Methods and Framework**

This research is based on existing literature and field research that includes interviews as well as conversations from both Indonesia and Qatar, apart from analysis and interpretation of multiple political, economic, security, and socio-cultural events and facts in the two countries. The contemporary nature of the relationship between Indonesia and Qatar and the limited academic studies available indicate that many of the developments and events have only taken place very recently; as such journalism is an important source of information for this research. Therefore, this study, in addition to official documents, books, peer-reviewed articles, and policy reports, relies on media articles published by reputable news agencies. To ensure reliability, the information in these media sources is not taken for granted. Aside from obtaining information

from reputable media, cross-checking is carried out by comparing with other sources.

As to the framework of analysis, the paper employs the five-dimensional framework introduced by Eberling (2017), which consists of five dimensions, namely political-diplomatic relations, economic-trade relations, military-security, cultural relations, and petroleum-energy relations. The framework is a comprehensive analytical tool which gives a complete comprehension of complex international cooperation instead of examining solely on orthodox approaches such as bilateral trade, politics, and security cooperation. The majority approaches in international cooperation focus on one or more elements of a country's bilateral partnership, which is unable to provide a comprehensive picture of the complex character of interstate cooperation. This research adopts the framework to understand the ties between Qatar and Indonesia. While the framework has mainly been adopted to understand China's ties with the Middle Eastern countries, the framework is relevant for this paper given that Qatar-Indonesia relations have, to some degree, encompassed the five realms of the approach.

### **III. Political-Diplomatic**

The diplomatic relations between Qatar and Indonesia began in 1976. In the beginning, however, there were not many diplomatic engagements between the two countries, mainly because of Doha's inward-looking policy. However, in early 1990s, Qatar started to improve its relations with many countries, encouraged by the then Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani's vigorous promotion of Qatar's foreign policy in the time of his father's leadership. It was only in March 1995 that the then Qatar Minister of Foreign Affairs made his official visit to Indonesia, followed by the opening of the Qatari Embassy in Jakarta in 1996 (Qatar Embassy in Jakarta n.d). Given Doha's growing attention, the government in Jakarta also reciprocated by way of the visit of the then Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas in March 1997 (ibid). Two years later, Indonesian President Abdulrahman Wahid visited to Doha to inaugurate the

Indonesian Embassy in Doha, which prompted further diplomatic exchanges among officials (ibid). These high-level exchanges resulted in the signing of several agreements, including Joint Minutes and MOUs between the two countries in 1997 and 2002 respectively, and a bilateral agreement on the cancellation of visa requirements for holders of diplomatic, service, and private passports (ibid). These advances were further enhanced by other organizational bases, including the regularization of annual side meetings at the UN, the Organization of Islamic Countries, as well as the cooperation between the Indonesian Parliament and the Shura Council, Qatar's legislative body, on capacity building and gender issues (Rakhmat 2017; Piri 2022).

Although over the years diplomatic activities between Indonesia and Qatar were limited to exchange visits among officials, there has been a consistent comradery between the two on each other's national interests and priorities. In May 2000, Qatar National Committee visited Indonesia to obtain Jakarta's support for the holding of the 2006 Asian Games in Qatar, which Indonesia supported (Qatar Embassy in Jakarta n.d). In the same year, based on the meeting between Indonesia and several Arab countries on June 7, 2000 on Jakarta's rejection of the declaration issued by the West Papua Region Conference on the succession of the territory from Indonesia, Qatar's Permanent Envoy in New York voted for Indonesia in the event any draft resolution aimed at Indonesia's unity and integrity was introduced (ibid). Political relations between Jakarta and Doha have also been focused on the issue of anti-corruption. The Indonesian Parliament and the Qatar Shura Council have been actively involved in the Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption (GOPAC), a platform for inter-parliamentary cooperation to overcome corruption and promote good governance (Piri 2022). From 2016 to 2020, the Indonesian Parliament served as the GOPAC Secretariat in Jakarta, during Indonesia's chairmanship for two terms. Afterwards, GOPAC has been under the chairmanship of the Qatar Shura Council (ibid). The two countries' parliaments have cooperated on exchange of technical assistance and capacity building related to anti-corruption efforts. The robustness of the relations between Indonesia and Qatar

on the issue of anti-corruption was demonstrated in December 2022, when the former vice chairperson of Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) Erry Riyana Hardjapamekas received the Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani International Anti-Corruption Excellence Award in recognition of his contributions to corruption eradication endeavors (Suharto 2022).

Such comradery was also demonstrated during the Gulf crisis in 2017. On July 7, 2017, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt decided to end their diplomatic relations with Qatar over allegations that the government in Doha supported the "radical" Muslim brotherhood movement and provided funding to opposition groups in Syria. This was followed by a blockade of air, land, and sea routes (Naheem 2017). Despite reeling from the blockade early on, Qatar's resilience and measures allowed it to ride out the dispute. In January 2021, a reconciliation of sorts occurred. In addition to the fact that the crisis did not affect Qatar's relations with Indonesia, the government in Jakarta took an initiative to become a mediator by contacting the Foreign Ministers of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, emphasizing that dialogue and reconciliation efforts must be carried out immediately (Vebriyanto 2017). These shared interests have provided an opportunity for Jakarta and Doha to capitalize on the potential for bilateral ties.

The most important breakthrough in the diplomatic engagement between Indonesia and Qatar took place in March 2022. The governments in Jakarta and Doha signed a Letter of Intent on humanitarian and development assistance for Afghanistan after the Taliban took over in August 2021 (Wardah 2022). The initiative, which was signed by Indonesia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi and Qatar's Minister of Foreign Affairs Muhammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, involves long-term aid, including scholarship and vocational training programs for Afghans, and plans to organize public dialogues on the role of women in Afghanistan. In the same month, official representatives from Qatar, Afghanistan, and Indonesia also held a meeting in Doha to discuss the situation in Afghanistan, during which they touched upon the dire economic, education, and humanitarian conditions in the country (Khaliq 2022). Besides offering humanitarian aid, both Doha and Jakarta

actively advocated to the Taliban women's rights, committed to oversee the transition period, and brought up the issue of humanitarian crises in multilateral avenues. A more concrete endeavor took place in December 2022 when the two countries convened the International Conference on Afghan Women's Education (ICAWWE), which aimed to gather support for Afghan women's education and to call on Afghanistan to exert efforts towards protecting women's rights (Aqil 2022). The conference, which was attended by 38 countries and several international organizations, NGOs, and businesses, was the first global conference to discuss the issue (ibid).

The cooperation between Qatar and Indonesia on the Afghanistan issue is not without reasons. Doha's endeavors to pursue relations with the Taliban are based on the country's ambition to fortify its position as a global mediator (Hodali 2021). This parallels Indonesia's foreign policy priorities under President Joko Widodo's administration. Upon entering office in 2014, Widodo unveiled his initiatives that aimed to strengthen Indonesia's position on the international stage. The most crucial of these was the "4+1" foreign policy outline which consists of "strengthening economic diplomacy; protection diplomacy; sovereignty and national diplomacy; and Indonesia's role in the region and globally" (Wicaksana and Wardhana 2021). Meanwhile, the "+1" refers to the strengthening of the infrastructure of diplomacy (ibid). These shared interests between Indonesia and Qatar seem to have prompted the two to work together to mediate in the crisis in Afghanistan. The Qatari government's invitation of Indonesia to the March meeting appeared to have been influenced by Jakarta's ability in establishing trust with the Taliban regime. Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population, is viewed as being able to mediate conflicts in the Muslim world, including the Afghanistan issue. This Islamic identity is also augmented by its neutral position, prompting Afghanistan's Taliban regime to have more confidence in dealing with Indonesia than with other countries. Indonesia's neutrality is based on its constitution, which says that Indonesia's goal is to foster global peace within the nature of its "free and active" foreign policy, which does not take sides in global affairs.

Qatar's invitation to Indonesia in mediating together the Afghanistan issue is also rooted in the long history of cooperation between Indonesia and Afghanistan (Saadah and Latif 2022). The latter was one of the first nations to recognize Indonesia's independence. Since then, the two countries have maintained cooperation in various fields. Indonesia is the 14<sup>th</sup> largest destination for Afghan export, while Afghanistan is one of Indonesia's largest export destinations in Central Asia (Rakhmat and Purnama 2022). Finally, Jakarta-Doha cooperation on the Afghanistan issue is also associated with the overall cooperation between the two countries. As mentioned earlier and will be explained further later, Indonesia and Qatar often meet at numerous multilateral avenues to discuss regional and global issues. This occurs alongside economic, cultural, and defense cooperation that have been increasingly pursued by the two countries.

#### **IV. Economic-Trade**

Aside from focusing on political and diplomatic realms, Indonesia and Qatar maintained a steady economic cooperation. Most recent reports showed that trade volume between the two countries is at a 29% year-on-year growth, reaching US\$758 million in the first seven months of 2022, from US\$587 million (Alagos 2022b). Qatar Chamber also noted that bilateral trade between Qatar and Indonesia increased by 78% from QR1.8 billion in 2016 to QR3.22 billion in 2021 (ibid). The trade primarily includes steel, medical equipment, paper and toilet paper, tableware, food and beverage, plywood, and automotive (ibid). Nonetheless, trade balance between Qatar and Indonesia is quite imbalanced, with Qatar's export to Indonesia reaching US\$947 million (UN International Trade Statistics Database 2020). This is not surprising given that Qatar, with one of the world's largest LNG reserves, is a major LNG exporter to Indonesia (Rakhmat and Pashya 2022). It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have a significant impact on Qatar-Indonesia economic-trade relations. Throughout 2020, the trade volume between the two countries increased to US\$1 billion (Zufrizal 2021). To maintain the robustness of the economic



cooperation, Indonesia Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi met with Qatar Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani in early 2021 to discuss ways to sustain the cooperation amidst an unstable global economy caused by the pandemic (Prihatin 2021).

Beyond export and import activities, two-way investments have also taken place. On the one hand, Indonesian construction firms PT. Adhi Karya and PT. Asia Building Products have succeeded in securing construction contracts in Qatar (MEED 2011). On the other hand, Qatari capital also made its way to Indonesia. The most important investment was the widely reported US\$1 billion joint investment fund by Qatar Holding, the subsidiary company of Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) (Latul 2010). Initially, the joint venture was announced in 2007 to fund major energy and infrastructure projects in Indonesia. Under the deal, the Qatari side would own 85% of the stake while the Indonesian government, through Its Ministry of Finance, would have the rest of the 15% (ibid). The fund was part of Qatar's US\$50 billion sovereign wealth fund aimed to increase its assets in Asia in response to the increasingly weakening dollar to capture higher returns. As a country with the world's largest gas fields, Qatar has been channeling surpluses from energy sales to the QIA. The joint investment fund, however, took several years to be realized. This was partly due to Qatar's insistence to own the entire project; Indonesia however was determined to maintain its 15% of the stake although it did not have the capital ready. It was only in 2010 that the local investment vehicle, PT Qatar Holding Indonesia, was established and the funds were finalized in 2016 (Alagos 2016).

In addition, Qatar has also invested in Indonesia's banking sector, with Qatar National Bank (QNB)'s US\$80.8 million investment to acquire a 65.59% stake in Bank Kesawan in 2010, becoming the controlling shareholder (Asian Banking & Finance 2011). The bank which operates across Indonesia was rebranded as QNB Kesawan. Nonetheless, after QNB increased its shares in 2014, the name was changed again to Bank QNB Indonesia (Almawadi 2014). In 2020, it was reported that Qatar owned 92.48% of the bank's shares (Saleh 2020). Aside from the banking sector, Indonesia

has also witnessed the growing flow of Qatari investments in its tourism sector. In 2018, Qatar Investment Authority signed an agreement with the government in Jakarta to develop the tourism potentials of Lombok Island, particularly in the Mandalika region, with Qatar investing US\$500 million (Sheany 2018). Qatar is also currently constructing new luxurious hotels and resorts in Indonesia, set to open in 2024; these are in Labuan Bajo, the westernmost point of the island of Flores, and in the Nusa Tenggara region of eastern Indonesia (Ibrahim 2022). This project is significant considering that the areas are part of Jakarta's new initiatives called the "10 New Balis," incorporating 10 sites in Indonesia that are being prepared to be the country's new tourist destinations. Involving Qatar in one of the country's vital projects demonstrates Doha's position in Jakarta's strategic calculations.

Furthermore, Qatar has also evolved strong interests in Indonesia's digital sector. The earliest was in 2007, when Qatar Telecommunications, now known as Ooredoo, bought the majority stakes of Indosat, one of Indonesia's largest telecommunication firms, owning 65% stakes (Aglionby 2008). As Indonesia accelerates its digital transformation, Qatar has presented itself as a partner. In 2021, Indosat, which has been rebranded as "Indosat Ooredoo" launched its first commercial 5G services in Solo, Central Java (Mingas 2021). The new 5G services aimed to provide Indonesian consumers with access to enhanced mobile broadband Internet, and to meet the increasing demand for digital content and services via mobile networks (*ibid*). Although it was launched in Solo, Ooredoo planned to extend the roll-out to major cities in Indonesia, including Jakarta, Surabaya, and Makassar (*ibid*). In the same year, however, the company approved a US\$6 billion merger of telco units of Qatar's Ooredoo and Hong Kong's CK Hutchison and aimed to finish the merger by 2025 (Evans 2021). The deal for the merger would create Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison, Indonesia's second biggest telecommunication firm after the government-backed Telkomsel (*ibid*). In addition, Indosat Ooredoo has also partnered with the UAE's Thuraya Telecommunications Company to develop services for Indonesian businesses (Gulf Times 2017). These include services using Indosat SIM cards roaming on the Thuraya network

along with bundling satellite devices with Indosat Ooredoo digital applications (ibid).

In addition to Indosat's story, businesses in Qatar have also participated in various digital expos in Indonesia. In October 2021, a number of businesses from Qatar took part in the 36th Trade Expo Indonesia Digital Edition 2021, hoping to expedite their entry into the Indonesian market (Alagos 2021). A similar effort was also made during a 2020 meeting between the Qatari Ambassador to Indonesia Fawziya Edrees Salman Al Sulaiti and the then Indonesian Minister of Communication and Information Johnny G. Plate. In the meeting, Al Sulaiti proposed that Qatari telecommunication companies be involved in the construction of middle mile and last mile infrastructure in Indonesia (Muslim 2020). While Indonesia offered Qatari digital companies a market to expand their businesses, the latter's move was expected to contribute to Indonesia's effort in accelerating the digital transformation. In recent years, the Indonesian government has been exerting effort to improve access to technology and communications, especially in poor regions and in the eastern part of the country, which still lack technological and digital connectivity. Qatar's interest in Indonesia's ICT sector were seen as responds to these needs. China has also been one of Indonesia's prominent partners in this regard, but concerns have indeed arisen (Priyandita et al. 2022). These include the possibility of espionage and surveillance, as well as making the country more dependent on China. Against this backdrop, Qatar could offer Indonesia a means to move beyond its traditional technological partners.

The economic cooperation between Indonesia and Qatar has been made possible by various diplomatic meetings and legal frameworks. In 2016, for instance, the government in Jakarta sent Alwi Shihab as the country's special envoy to the Middle East and OIC to invite the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry to attend the Trade Expo Indonesia (TEI) (Saeid 2016). During the meeting, Qatari businesses were presented with investment opportunities in Indonesia and were invited to discuss potential economic collaborations with Indonesia (ibid). Other important meetings include the participation of Qatar Ministry of Finance at

the Conference of Supporting Investment in Indonesia in 2000; the presence of the Qatar Minister of Foreign Affairs in the 2000 Ministerial Meeting in Bali to complement the Ministerial Meeting on Investment Promotion in Indonesia; the attendance of Qatar Central Bank in a meeting of Central Banks and Governors of the Monetary Authorities of the OIC Member Countries in Surabaya in 2014; the meeting between CEO of Qatar National Bank and the then Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla in 2014; Qatar's participation in the World Islamic Economic Forum in Jakarta in 2016; meetings with Abdullah Bin Hamad Al-Attiyah (ABHA) International Foundation for Energy & Sustainable Development; and the visits of Indonesian Minister of National Development and Planning in 2015 (Qatar Embassy in Jakarta n.d). The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the number of these diplomatic exchanges, reflecting how the two countries view one another in the efforts towards post-COVID-19 economic recovery. These include Jokowi's visit to Qatar in 2020 (Qatar News Agency 2020), as well as the visits of Indonesian Deputy Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State-Owned Enterprises in October and November 2021 respectively (Kumala 2021; Kementerian BUMN 2021). These meetings have provided avenues for relevant explorations and discussions of opportunities between the two countries.

Buttressing this were regulatory frameworks attempting to support economic ties. In 2000, the two countries inked an agreement on the Encouraging and Protection of Mutual investments (Qatar Embassy in Jakarta n.d). This was followed by the signing of the Convention on the Avoidance of Double Taxation and Prevention of Financial Evasion with Regard to Income Tax in 2006 and an agreement on economic and technical cooperation, as well as an MoU between the Indonesian government and the Qatar Investment Authority on Investment (ibid). Since 2017, Qatar-Indonesia Business Forums have been regularly organized to serve as an avenue to identify opportunities and provide mutual access for businesses from the two countries (Ribka 2017). These frameworks have served as a crucial platform to fortify economic cooperation and increase understanding. Various meetings, summits, and agreements have been utilized by Jakarta and Doha to raise

awareness about each other and to universalize each other's interests. Furthermore, to facilitate the growing cooperation, in 2013 Qatar's Civil Aviation Authority inked an MoU with Indonesia's Ministry of Transportation to multiply the number of flights by Qatar Airways to Indonesia (Qatar Embassy in Jakarta n.d). The move appears to have contributed to deepening contacts among investors and businesspersons.

The growing Jakarta-Doha economic relations have mainly been influenced by common economic diversification efforts. While Indonesia aimed to expand from its traditional economic partners such as the neighboring ASEAN, Australia, and the West, Qatar has looked to diversify its strategic options in Asia. This started in the 1980s and 1990s when the Western world was struggling with inflation and economic growth, while Asian countries were experiencing high growth (Jensen 2017: 108). As many companies from the US and Europe moved their manufacturing bases to Asia, many GCC countries followed through. This trend was strengthened after the 9/11 attacks and the growing US involvement in Middle Eastern affairs (ibid). With the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the continuing instabilities in the Middle East, and the American pivot to Asia, the GCC countries have become more aware that it should pursue stronger ties with Asia. Like other GCC countries, with its "Look East" policy, Doha has expanded its relations with India, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea. As the largest Southeast Asian country with massive development programs, Indonesia offered Qatar not only access to large markets and investment opportunities, but also a hub to strengthen Doha's footholds in the wider Asia-Pacific region. It is, nonetheless, not only the GCC that was interested in looking East. Asian countries were also increasingly looking towards the Middle East and Africa. With China's Belt and Road Initiatives, many Asian countries capitalized global interests in Asia's growth, Indonesia included. It is not only attracted to Qatari petrodollars to assist its goal to revamp its economy, but also considers the tiny Gulf state as a bridge that connects Indonesia with the broader Middle East and North African region.

The economic cooperation between Indonesia and Qatar also revolved around the issue of workers. Since the early 1990s, there

has been a flow of migrant workers from Indonesia to Qatar. By October 2022, there were 16,690 Indonesian workers in Qatar, comprising of domestic workers and professionals at Qatari or multinational firms (Budilaksono 2022). While cases of human rights abuses towards these workers were relatively minimal compared to other Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, the government in Doha and Jakarta signed a cooperation agreement to protect migrant workers in Qatar on 20 January 2008 (Rochmaedah et al. 2022: 185-195). The two countries appear to have learned from Indonesia-Saudi Arabia relations, whereby cases of mistreatment of migrant workers often act as a source of tension in bilateral ties. One clear case was that of Tuti Tursilawati, a domestic worker executed in 2018 after being convicted of murdering her employer. The Saudi government did not warn either Tuti's family or the Indonesian consulate. In response, the government in Jakarta filed a strong protest Saudi Arabia and summoned the Saudi Ambassador to Indonesia. Other cases have also affected the cooperation between Jakarta and Riyadh (Rakhmat 2022c).

Ties between Qatar and Indonesia have been bolstered by aid and assistance. In 2010, for example, Ooredoo, through its operating company Indosat, helped people in Yogyakarta following Mount Merapi's eruption that forced the evacuation of nearly 350,000 people (The Peninsula 2014). The assistance included the construction of 100 houses and a water supply facility. It was also reported that the company, in collaboration with the Leo Messi Foundation, launched mobile clinics in Indonesia in 2014 to provide free medical services (ibid). The company also donated provisions to victims of severe flooding across Indonesia in 2013 and 2014 (ibid). Meanwhile, in 2015, the Qatari government offered US\$50 million financial assistance for Rohingya refugees in Aceh and North Sumatra (Middle East Eye 2016). Three years later, when massive earthquakes hit the Indonesian region of Palu, Donggala, and Lombok, the Red Crescent Qatar dispatched personnel and provided US\$ 5 million (Nathalia 2018). The latest of these aids were provided in December 2021 when the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) inked an agreement with Indonesia Credit Impact Solutions Pte Ltd to provide rapid response impact seed funding to SMEs in the

healthcare and food distribution sectors affected by the pandemic (Qatar News Agency 2021). It is also important to note that under the agreement with Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, Qatar Charity has been operating in Indonesia, assisting in the construction of schools and orphanages, as well as provision of business capital for underprivileged Indonesians (Reliefweb 2020). The most recent development took place in December 2022 when an earthquake hit Indonesia's West Java province. Qatar Charity provided urgent relief aid including food items, drinking water, hygiene kits, and other items (Gulf Times 2022). The organization additionally distributed aid to 1,000 families in four villages completely affected by the earthquake which damaged buildings and displaced people (ibid). It is difficult to deny that, although fostering cooperation is not an easy process, the linkage between Indonesia and Qatar has been maintained through humanitarian aid.

## V. Military-Security

Jakarta's military-security relations with Doha have also been going on despite being modest, in contrast to its relations with other Gulf countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain (Rakhmat 2022b). This is primarily influenced by the fact that Qatar is not a global security player and at the same time has maintained military-security ties with its traditional partners such as the US and the UK. Most military-security engagements between Indonesia and Qatar focused on visits and exchanges. In 2014, for instance, the General Command of the Qatari Armed Forces participated in the hosting of the 13th UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and Criminal Justice, as well as attended the Endo Defense Forum in Jakarta, where the two countries discussed ways to expand military-security cooperation (Qatar Embassy in Jakarta n.d).

Beyond military-security-related visits, Indonesia has been interested in expanding its military product exports to Qatar. Although data is not available, Indonesian-made light tanks and military weapons were reportedly popular in Qatar (Yosephine 2016). The only transaction that was widely reported was Qatar's

planned 2009 purchase of the military aircraft CN-235 manufactured by the Indonesian company PT Dirgantara Indonesia (MEED 2009). In addition, Qatar has been importing military outfits for its military forces from Indonesia's leading textile and garment manufacturer PT. Sritex (Purwanto 2016). As Qatar has been working to upgrade its defense capability, Indonesia serves as a competitive option. Moreover, these transactions have been driven by Indonesian efforts to promote its military products in the Middle East as a whole. In 2016, Indonesian Minister of Defense Ryamizard Ryacudu invited Qatar's Minister of Defence Khalid bin Mohammed Al Attiyah to the 2016 Indonesian Defence Expo in Jakarta, where they discussed the possibility of cooperation on military production (ibid). Thereafter, the Indonesian government also invited Qatari delegations to attend Trade Expo Indonesia 2016, where they promoted Indonesian military equipment (ibid). These invitations have led Qatari policy makers to begin purchasing military products from Indonesia. Indeed, following the events, the government in Doha expressed its interest in considering military equipment manufactured by Indonesian state-owned firms specializing in military and commercial products, PT. Pindad; the Indonesian aerospace company, PT. Dirgantara Indonesia; and the Indonesian shipbuilding company, PT. PAL. These companies have been supplying military products to other Gulf countries (ibid).

This, nonetheless, is not a one-way process. In 2022, the Indonesian Air Force (TNI-AU) reportedly purchased Qatar's fleet of Dassault Mirage 2000-5 fighter aircraft, which have been retired from service after the government in Doha bought replacements (Asia Pacific Defense Journal 2022). Qatar decided to choose Indonesia to buy its used Mirage 2000-5 fighters, despite fillers earlier sent by France and Bulgaria. Reports reveal that Indonesia would use these as a training and transition platform. Even though the deal is yet to be confirmed, Naser Al Tamimi, a UK-based analyst on Asia and Middle East relations, reported that Doha's move was based on Jakarta's higher offer exceeding US\$700 million.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, Mehran Kemrava, a professor at Georgetown University in Qatar, argued that the decision made by the Qatari

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<sup>1</sup> Personal interview, November 2022.



government is connected to Qatar's policy of hedging, where it attempts to diversify relations with as many actors as possible. With Qatar's extensive security cooperation with France and Bulgaria, forging ties with Indonesia is proving to be strategic.<sup>2</sup>

Doha's hedging strategy appears to have been welcomed by Indonesia. Although Qatar is not a global security player, certain circumstances have also pressured Indonesia to diversify its military-security cooperation. In Jakarta's view, the declining US role in Southeast Asia and China's increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea signify the need to find non-traditional security partners. Qatar seems to be an alternative. Between 2015 and 2020, the Indonesian government appointed Muhammad Basri Sidehabi, former Air Marshall, as the Indonesian Ambassador to Qatar (Raja 2017). During Sidehabi's term, Indonesia attempted to fortify its military-security ties with Qatar. On one occasion, in 2017, he invited Head of Strategic Studies Center of Qatar Armed Force Hamad Mohammed Al Marri to visit Indonesia to learn more about the Indonesian military industry as well as to attend the Indo-Defense 2017 in Jakarta (ibid). In his meetings with Qatari officials, Sidehabi frequently gave presentations on the development of Indonesia's defense equipment. There was also plan of cooperation between Indonesian National Police and Qatar Police, known as Al Fazaa, on juvenile crime, human trafficking, and capacity building among security officers (Purwanto 2016). In 2020 and 2022 respectively, Indonesian Minister of Defense Prabowo Subianto separately met with the Qatari Ambassador to Indonesia and Qatar's Defense Attache to discuss ways to foster Indonesia-Qatar cooperation on the military-security field and the possible purchase of Indonesian-made weaponry (The Peninsula 2020). These meetings bore fruit a year later, when Barzan Holding, the strategic investment and procurement arm of Qatar's Ministry of Defense, declared its commitment to cooperate with Pindad on weapon procurement, technology transfer, and human resource development (Arief 2021). In that same year, a representative and consultant of Barzan, Christopher Ott, was also hired by Jakarta to facilitate Indonesia's defense sales with the U.S (Intelligence Online

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<sup>2</sup> Personal interview, November 2022.

2021). Engaging with Qatar helped secure markets for the Indonesian defense industry and at the same time contributed to efforts to search for new partners outside its traditional security circles.

## **VI. Cultural**

Beyond the traditional realms of political-diplomatic, economic-trade, and military-security, the ties between Jakarta and Doha have expanded into the cultural sphere. One of the ways this was fortified is through cultural events. In 2016, the Indonesian Embassy in Qatar organized a cultural arts performance with the theme “Wonderful Indonesia” attended by, among others, the Qatari royal family. The events exhibited a variety of culinary delights, dance performances, traditional music performances, and art (Gibbons 2016a). In December 2022, the Indonesian Embassy in Qatar also organized “The Exotic Indonesian Batik Heritage” in the “Katara Celebrations During the World Cup 2022” (Kementerian Luar Negeri RI 2022). The exhibition, officially opened by the Indonesian Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, displayed 42 pieces of batik cloth, from all around Indonesia (ibid). Appreciating the growing relations between the two countries, Indonesia was chosen by Qatar as a partner country for a key annual event organized by the Qatari government, the Qatar Year of Culture in 2023 (Diah 2021). The agreement was signed in 2021 by the representatives of each state. Indonesia is to be the first Southeast Asian country to participate as a partner. The Qatar Year of Culture has been organized annually since 2012. The year-long initiative will include various cultural exhibitions, seminars, and events organized in both Indonesia and Qatar. Qatar’s close partners like France, Japan, Turkey, and India, have also been selected to join. Selecting Indonesia as partner signifies the position of Jakarta in Qatar’s foreign policy (Marpaung 2021).

As Indonesia and Qatar share similar Islamic backgrounds, religious-related activities have also contributed to the cultural cooperation between Jakarta and Doha. Under the program named

“Muazin (an Islamic term for callers for prayer) Diplomacy,” the two countries agreed in 2021 to hold exchange programs among imams and muazzins to learn and to teach Islam in Qatar (Murtado 2021). Based on the researcher’s interviews with several organizations involved in these initiatives, imams and muazzins from Indonesia, many of whom have worked in Qatar, have had positive impressions from the people of Qatar. This is not only due to their friendly characters, but their deep religious knowledge. Moreover, Indonesian imams and muazzins have moderate religious understanding and tolerances to the different sects and religions that exist in Qatar (ibid). This positive impression has an indirect impact on Qataris’ view of Indonesia, which could contribute to the strengthening of relations between the two countries. Although more detailed information is yet available, it was also reported that Qatar National Mosque intended to cooperate with Indonesian National Mosque (Istiqlal Mosque) (Masjid Istiqlal 2021).

Indonesian Muslim organizations have also played a vital role in maintaining religious ties between Jakarta and Doha. In 2016, Indonesian Islamic Da’wah Council (DDII) inked an agreement with Qatar Center for the Presentation of Islam (QPCI) on the propagation of Islam (RMOL.ID 2016). The agreement stipulates the cooperation on producing Islam-related publication materials in Indonesian, including the translation of contents of Islamweb.net, an online portal on Islamic knowledge owned by Qatar’s Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. A few years later, in December 2021, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), one of Indonesia’s largest Muslim organisations, also cooperated with one of Qatar’s donor agencies, Qilaa Group, in building 100 mosques and 10 hospitals in the remote areas of Indonesia (Triono 2022). Some of these will be carried out in Indonesia’s new capital city in Kalimantan (ibid). To complement the agreement, in early 2022, the Qatari Ambassador to Indonesia made a special visit to the NU headquarter to discuss further engagement in education and religious moderation (Michella 2022). This move is crucial as it can be considered as part of Qatar’s ongoing effort to project itself as a global Muslim actor that is moderate, tolerant, pluralistic, and forward-looking. Indonesia, as the world’s largest Muslim nation, is a source of interests for Doha

to present itself as an important actor in the global Muslim community. Doha's moderation movement tends to be in line with the vision espoused by the Indonesian government through the concept of "Islam Nusantara" – an interpretation of Islam that takes into account the value of moderation and tolerance as tools to boost its standing in the Muslim world. Over the years, the Indonesian government effectively outsourced its religious soft-power to NU (Dorsey 2020). Aside from being one of the largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia, its members also include some of the most prominent Indonesian figures such as Indonesian Vice President Ma'ruf Amin and Minister of Religious Affairs Yaquut Cholil Qoumas. The shared goal to promote the notion of 'moderate' Islam has become Doha's and Jakarta's collective flagship vision and will shape Qatar-Indonesia future engagement.

At the educational level, both countries have also developed nascent relations, which had been formalized with an MOU on education and culture signed during the visit of the Emir of Qatar to Indonesia in 2017. For several years, the Qatari government has offered scholarships for Indonesians to study at the high school and university levels in Qatar. The most important example is the annual scholarship provided by Qatar University to learn Arabic at its one-year Arabic for Non-Native Speakers (ANNS) program. According to the fieldwork carried out by the researcher, almost every year a minimum of two Indonesians are enrolled in the program. Based on the data from Qatar's Ministry of Education and Higher Education in 2021, there are approximately 2000 students from Indonesia pursuing education in Qatar at various levels of education (Kementerian Luar Negeri RI 2021a). This number may increase soon, given that during the meeting between the Indonesian Ambassador to Qatar Ridwan Hassan and the Qatari Minister of Education and Higher Education in 2021, the Qatari government expressed its intent to increase the number of scholarships for Indonesians to study in Qatar (ibid). Apart from agreeing to expand academic partnership to include exchange programs for teachers and students, the Indonesian Ambassador promoted the recently established Indonesian International Islamic University (UIII) to

collaborate with its Qatari counterparts (ibid), seemingly in an effort to follow up the 2019 plan between the two countries to build a twin university between academic institutions (Santosa 2019).

In a meeting with the Indonesian Ambassador in August 2021, the President of Qatar University announced that the university would open a branch in Indonesia (Sinaga 2021) Given that the university is ranked among the best universities in the Arab world, this initiative was welcomed by the Indonesian people. Over the years, several Indonesian universities have collaborated with Qatar University, including Universitas Darussalam Gontor, Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, and Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah (UNIDA n.d; UIN Walisongo Semarang 2014; UIN News Online 2022). In addition to joint community service activities, the partnerships include curriculum exchange, organizing joint conferences, as well as joint research on religious moderation in the Islamic world, which signifies the emergence of religious moderation as a new strategic synthesis between the two (ibid). It is important to note that cooperation on Islamic studies and religious moderation have also been signed between Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo with the Forum for Arab and International Relations, a think tank based in Doha, as well as with Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies (UIN Walisongo Semarang 2014).

People-to-people exchanges between Indonesia and Qatar have also been maintained in the tourism sector. Although precise data are difficult to find, there has been an increasing flow of tourists between the two countries. The latest data from Indonesia's Central Agency on Statistics (BPS) showed that there were 1989 Qatari tourists visiting Indonesia in 2019 (Kementerian Luar Negeri RI 2021b). This increase was a result of the signing of the Air Transport Agreement which aimed to multiply the number of Qatari tourists visiting Indonesia and vice-versa. Additionally, Doha and Jakarta also signed an MOU on tourism investments and planned to sign an MOU on tourism cooperation (ibid). Over the years, Indonesia has exerted efforts to attract Qatari tourists. One important initiative resulting from the agreement was the *Wonderful Indonesia* ads broadcast over Al Jazeera in 2016; it had 7,884 views (Gibbons

2016b). Recently, during the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar, Indonesia also made a tourism campaign through digital out-of-home advertising at three points near to the World Cup stadiums and through bus advertising (Idrus and Ihsan 2022). Tourist flows between Indonesia and Qatar are expected to grow given that the two countries have been working on a Travel Corridor Arrangement (TCA) (VNA 2021).

Sports is another aspect of Indonesia-Qatar cultural relations, especially after the signing of a MoU in 2021 on promoting exchanges between coaches, athletes, and sport specialists (Agonia 2021). The agreement was signed between Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) and Indonesian Olympic Committee (KOI). The collaboration is aimed to increase athletes' participation in sports events and to promote exchange of knowledge on sports- and physical activity-related issues, as well as mutual investments in sport facilities (ibid). The agreement was a result of a meeting between QOC and KOI in December 2020. Over the years, the two countries have also maintained mutual visits and support among sports actors such as the visit of Indonesian Minister of Youth and Sports to Doha in 2020 (Daelpos 2020). When Indonesia hosted the Asian Games in 2018, Qatar was among the countries which helped in hosting the events (ibid). Indonesia also played a role in the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Despite not qualifying for the tournament, the official souvenir match ball was manufactured in Madiun, East Java by Indonesian company PT Global Way (Llewellyn 2022). Apart from the fact that sports diplomacy has been part of Qatar's foreign policy after being selected as the host of 2022 FIFA World Cup, the sport cooperation between Indonesia and Qatar have also been maintained as the two countries share the same interests. For example, both countries will host several major sporting events in the next coming years; Qatar will host the Asian Games in 2030 while Indonesia will be the host of the FIBA World Cup 2023. It is therefore possible that sport will be another realm that will bind the two countries in the next coming years.

Historically, promoting dialogue between people of different nations has been a way to build bridges of understanding between countries. Similarly, as the partnership between Indonesia and Qatar

has grown significantly in recent years, both governments have come to recognize the importance of overcoming linguistic-cultural barriers. They have therefore worked cooperatively to increase the number of Qatari and Indonesian professionals who are acquainted with each other's societal norms and customs, methods of performing business, and national and institutional interests.

## **VII. Petroleum-Energy**

Energy is undoubtedly an important element in Indonesia's relations with Qatar. This is primarily due to the latter's position in the global energy industry. Currently, Qatar has the world's third largest LNG reserves. In the meantime, Indonesia needs considerable amounts of energy to sustain economic development. Its energy needs predominantly come from oil (50.04%) and natural gas (21.94%) (Siregar and Zulkarnain 2021). Indonesia currently imports oil of 400,000 barrels per day, with most of imports coming from the Middle East (Gueraiche and Alexander 2022). While most of its energy sources come from Saudi Arabia, Indonesia has also fostered energy cooperation with smaller regional countries. In 2020, energy exports from Qatar to Indonesia were recorded at US\$375 million for LNG and \$140 million for refined petroleum (UN International Trade Statistics Database 2020).

In addition to energy trade, investments have also been pursued by the two countries. As for Indonesian energy investment in Qatar, the only one reported was Indonesian state oil and gas company Pertamina winning a bid for a 25% share in the onshore oil block III in Qatar worth US\$11 million in 2007 (O'Neill 2007). Meanwhile, over the years, Indonesia has been exerting efforts to invite Qatari energy firms such as Qatar Petroleum and RasGas for oil and gas explorations (Sen 2015). In 2015, private Indonesian firm PT Medco Power Generation Indonesia also made a similar proposal in the "CEO Plenary Session" at the 9th International Petroleum Technology Conference (IPTC) in Qatar for explorations in hard-to-read regions in eastern part of Indonesia, which requires significant capital and technology (ibid). Indonesia's efforts have

been met with some failures and successes. In 2011, Qatar Petroleum planned to develop a US\$8 billion refinery in Balongan (Rini 2011). It was reported that the company had completed the feasibility study for the project. No progress has been made as of this writing. Earlier in 2009, Qatar was also interested in buying an 85% stake in a planned US\$1 billion power plant in Bali, but again no progress has been reached (Trade Arabia 2009). One possible explanation is that currently Indonesia has small margins in its downstream oil sector, and the price difference between the finished products and raw materials is very slim (Otele et al 2022). As a result, crude oil processing has become less attractive for investors and this condition has made many companies to back out from the agreements (ibid).

These stories, however, do not imply that Qatari investments do not make their way to Indonesia. Billions of dollars of capital have been flowing from Qatar to Indonesia's energy sector. Aside from the well-known US\$1 billion Joint Investment Fund which, among others, was aimed to enhance Indonesia's energy sector, the widely reported development took place in 2016 when Qatar-based energy firm Nebras Power bought a 35.5% stake in Paiton Energy, an Indonesian power producer which owns a 2,0245 MW thermal power station in East Java (Finn 2016). Although in March 2019 *Bloomberg* reported that Nebras Power was considering selling its stake in Paiton Energy, the company denied the report and declared that "it is committed to a long-lasting economic cooperation between Qatar and Indonesia" (Reuters 2019). It is crucial to note that in 2017 the company also poured US\$1 billion investment in the development of an 800MW natural gas-fired power project in North Sumatra (NS Energy 2017). According to the Indonesian Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, the company allotted US\$800 million for the power station, while the remaining US\$200 million would be allocated on a floating storage and regasification unit (ibid). The head of agreement was signed between Nebras Power, Indonesia's State Electricity Company (PLN), and state-owned power producer Pembangkitan Jawa-Bali (PJB). According to a report by *The Peninsula*, the agreement consisted of the development of a power plant, the regasification unit, and the



sourcing of LNG in Medan. Nebras Power was responsible for the development, financing, construction, as well as the operation and maintenance of the plant (The Peninsula 2017).

These energy-related investments between Indonesia and Qatar are relatively limited in comparison to other GCC countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Rakhmat and Pashya 2022). Nonetheless, considering Indonesia's needs to secure its energy resources and Qatar's interests to invest its petrodollars, it is likely that Jakarta-Doha energy investment cooperation would intensify in the future. One of Qatar's energy firms, Qatar Petrochemical Company, for example, has opened a representative office in Jakarta to explore potential opportunities in the country (Embassy of Malaysia in Doha 2010). In July 2022, Indonesia's Korina Refinery Aceh also visited Doha to invite Qatari investors to invest in its refinery and to forge joint projects for numerous downstream products such as diesel, jet fuel, and lube oil (Alagos 2022a). These demonstrate that energy cooperation between Indonesia and Qatar would intensify in the next coming years. There is also a possibility that Qatar may follow its neighboring countries such as the UAE and Saudi which have garnered renewable energy cooperation with Indonesia.

## VIII. Conclusion

This research has examined the relationship between Indonesia and Qatar through Eberling's five-dimensional framework. The majority analysis of Indonesia-Middle East relations focuses on either energy and trade or cultural and religious ties as the primary driver of the cooperation. Nonetheless, this article has demonstrated that there is more to the story. Economic and cultural relations are important, but not sufficient to offer a comprehensive overview of the cooperation. It was demonstrated that the cooperation has been maintained in various fields, including political-diplomatic, economic-trade, military-security, cultural, and petroleum-energy relations. From Qatar's perspective, Indonesia fits well in its "Look East" foreign policy orientation. As described by the Vice Chairman

of Qatar Chamber in October 2022, Indonesia, given its strategic location and large population, is “an important gateway to the Southeast Asian region and a promising market” for Qatari exports and investors (Alagos 2022b). Meanwhile, in Indonesia’s point of view, Qatar not only offers an untapped export market and investment prospects, but it also serves as a hub to expand economically in the wider Middle East and North African region. Despite being Southeast Asia’s largest economy, Indonesia still needs to attract considerable investments to improve its weakening economy and to secure its energy sources. At the same time, the continuing regional instability in the region has also pressured Qatar to apply hedging strategy to establish political and security with as many countries as possible, including Indonesia, a country that shares similar views on many global and regional issues. This has been welcomed by Indonesia, which not only possesses an ambition to strengthen its position in the international stage but has also sought alternative partners in light of the China-US tensions in the region.

As Qatar looks East for economic and geopolitical opportunities to expand their strategic options away from the West, and as Indonesia is beginning to move away from its traditional partners, the Indonesia-Qatar relations will grow and expand in the coming future. While the ties will primarily be economic in nature, which could be underpinned by the finalization of GCC-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the signing of a comprehensive economic partnership agreement, which Indonesia has signed with the UAE, there will be other sectors to follow. These include enhanced cooperation on promoting narrative of moderate Islam, renewable energy sectors, tourism, as well as military security.

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