

Governance Challenges in Bridging Theory and Practice: Indonesian Foreign Policy

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Abstract: This paper examines challenges that Indonesia potentially faces in bridging theory-practice gaps in foreign policy formulation. Using qualitative library research methodology with document analysis based on theory-practice gap theoretical framework, the research identifies six key potential challenges: cultural and epistemological divergences between academics and policymakers, language barriers, difficulties in accurately analyzing external actors, limitations of abstract theoretical models, and structural-institutional constraints within Indonesia's knowledge ecosystem. The findings suggest these challenges potentially result in less coherent and more reactive foreign policy decisions. These findings have significant implications for Indonesian foreign policy practice, suggesting that institutional reforms focusing on knowledge integration mechanisms, capacity building for policy analysts, and the creation of collaborative platforms between academics and practitioners are essential for developing more coherent, anticipatory, and evidence-based foreign policy. This research contributes to the limited discourse on theory-practice gaps in Indonesian foreign policy studies, offering insights for strengthening evidence-based policy formulation.

INTRODUCTION

The divide between theoretical knowledge and diplomatic practice represents one of the most significant governance challenges facing Indonesian foreign policy today. In an era of intensifying geopolitical competition and regional uncertainty, the inability to effectively bridge this gap threatens Indonesia's capacity to translate its aspirations for regional leadership into coherent strategic action. This theory-practice disconnect is not merely an academic concern but a fundamental governance challenge with direct implications for Indonesia's national interests and regional influence that will be represented by foreign policy.

Foreign policy is an important instrument for a country. For example, Indonesia's involvement through its foreign policy is a manifestation of efforts to maintain world peace, which is very important for the implementation of Indonesia's international commitments and foreign policy (MD et al., 2020, p. 3). Foreign policy also often undergoes dynamics based on the ideological factors of the policy-making leaders. Soekarno, for example, had a strong anti-colonial foreign policy (Yeremia, 2020, p. 2). This then has implications for the behavior of Indonesia in international politics as well as the foreign policies made by Indonesia. Then, Indonesia's foreign policy often transforms based on the leadership of the policy-making domain itself (subsequent leaders). Foreign policy is actually a complex expression of the interplay between idealized visions and practical realities that are often distant. International relations theorists have long observed the phenomenon of a gap between academia and diplomatic practice in the global arena. Alexander George, for example, described how cultural differences between academia and policymakers have hindered the development of international relations theory by academics and the use of this knowledge by practitioners (George, 1993).

According to Nye, this gap is not simply a communication problem, but reflects a fundamental difference in orientation, values, and priorities between those who study theory and those responsible for implementing policy (Nye, 2009). Nye also argues that policy practitioners often find theoretical discourse too abstract and detached from the pragmatic demands of decision-making, while academics see policy practice as too reactive and less systematic in utilizing available knowledge (Nye, 2009). Meanwhile, in Indonesia, which is a country with increasing regional and global role aspirations, the possibility of a gap between theory and practice in foreign policy making is an urgent issue to study. According to Sukma, the free-active foreign policy doctrine that has been the conceptual basis of Indonesia's foreign policy since the beginning of independence has undergone various reinterpretations in practice (Sukma, 1997). The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a foreign policy-making institution, often operates in a complex bureaucratic landscape with limited formal mechanisms to integrate academic research into the decision-making process. While there is increasing interaction between the theoretical and practical domains, there is no systematic structure that facilitates knowledge transfer from research to policy (Anwar, 2020). These urgencies and challenges are then increasingly complex, considering the dynamic geopolitical conditions and shifting global power constellations that demand adaptive policy responses based on deep theoretical understanding.

Therefore, the need for linear significance research to bridge the gap between theory and practice in Indonesian foreign policy is inevitable. First, the integration of academic knowledge into the policy process makes it possible to improve the quality of diagnosis of increasingly complex international situations. This can be seen from Weatherbee's assumption that a theoretical understanding of ASEAN regional dynamics has the potential to help Indonesia navigate multidimensional challenges in the region more effectively (Weatherbee, 2019). Second, a knowledge-based approach enables the formulation of diplomacy strategies that are anticipatory rather than reactive. The integration of academic analysis in policy planning can strengthen the capacity to anticipate geopolitical developments. Third, a solid conceptual foundation allows Indonesia to project its influence more strategically in various diplomatic agendas. This research aims to analyze the possible challenges that Indonesia will face in its efforts to bridge the gap between theory and practice in foreign policy making. As a developing country with increasing regional leadership aspirations, Indonesia faces a dilemma in integrating theoretical knowledge into its foreign policy-making process. Through an exploration of the structural, epistemological, and sociocultural dimensions of this gap, this study aims to identify possible crucial obstacles and evaluate their implications for the quality and effectiveness of Indonesia's foreign policy in responding to increasingly complex regional and global dynamics.

Based on this understanding, this research poses a central question: What are the possible challenges that Indonesia will face in trying to bridge the gap between theory and practice in foreign policy making? Exploring the answer to this statement is projected to provide substantial practical and theoretical research significance. Practically, an in-depth understanding of the challenges of bridging the theory-practice gap can pave the way for institutional reforms and strengthening analytical capacity in Indonesia's foreign policy formulation. From a theoretical perspective, the exploration of the Indonesian case has the potential to enrich the academic discourse on the interaction between knowledge and foreign policy making. The gap between theory and practice in foreign policy has been a concern for a number of researchers. Various studies have identified cultural differences between academics and policymakers that hinder the development and application of international relations theory. Several solutions have been proposed, such as knowledge bridge models and academic-practitioner exchange platforms.

However, these studies have predominantly focused on developed country contexts with better knowledge ecosystems (For more details, see: Arteaga dkk., 2024; Bercovitch dkk., 2005; Björkdahl, 2001; Cadier & Sus, 2017; Cairney, 2023; Eriksson, 2014; George, 1993; George & Bennett, 2005; Hanania & Abrahms, 2023; Holthaus, 2020; Jentleson & Ratner, 2011; Jervis, 2008; Lane, 2007; Murphy & Fulda, 2011; Nye, 2008, 2009b; Pattyn dkk., 2019; Phillips, 2010; Renshon & Renshon, 2008; Tocci, 2018; Toje, 2002a, 2002b, 2008; Tsakonas, 2005; Walt, 2005; Wood, 2014).

This research takes a position among the existing literature by offering an exploration of the possible challenges that Indonesia will face in bridging the theory-practice gap in Indonesia's foreign policy. Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on developed countries and have never taken a research focus in Indonesia, this research will identify possible challenges faced by Indonesia as a developing country. The novelty of the research lies in analyzing the possible challenges that will be faced in bridging the gap between theory and practice in foreign policy by taking Indonesia as the locus. By applying George (1993) three types of knowledge framework, this research will analyze the possible challenges that will be faced in bridging the theory-practice gap in Indonesia, something that has not been done in previous studies. As such, this research not only fills a void in the literature on research related to bridging the theory and practice gap in Indonesian foreign policy, but also expands the discourse on knowledge-policy interactions in the context of developing countries, paving the way for the development of an integrative model that better suits Indonesia's socio-political realities. Through this research, the author hopes that it can be an intellectual call to integrate the theoretical domain and the practical domain for the sake of creating a more effective/developed foreign policy through adequate theoretical assumptions.

Studies on the theory-practice gap in Indonesian foreign policy are still very limited, with some researchers only addressing this phenomenon in passing. This research aims to fill the gap in the literature by identifying the specific challenges Indonesia faces in bridging the gap, considering the unique characteristics of Indonesia's knowledge ecosystem. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to analyzing possible obstacles in bridging the theory-practice gap in the Indonesian context, while paving the way for institutional reform and strengthening analytical capacity in Indonesia's foreign policy formulation.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a library research approach. Data is obtained through a systematic search of relevant secondary sources, including scholarly journal articles, academic textbooks, and policy documents. Referring to Levy & Ellis, the author will carry out a literature study method that includes analysis, synthesis, and critical evaluation of existing ideas and concepts (Levy & J. Ellis, 2006). Data analysis applied an approach focusing on the three types of knowledge in George (1993) theoretical framework: 1) abstract conceptual models; 2) general knowledge of enabling conditions; and 3) understanding of actor characteristics (George, 1993). Referring to Bowen, data analysis will be conducted through a systematic process that includes identification of references, extraction of key concepts, and synthesis of findings (Bowen, 2009). The validity of this research will be tested through source triangulation. The research is limited to analyzing the possible challenges Indonesia faces in bridging the theory-practice gap in foreign policy making.

This limitation was consciously set to allow in-depth exploration of problematic aspects that may arise, without attempting to develop comprehensive solutions or prescriptive models.

The research recognizes that without primary data collection through interviews or direct observation, there may be gaps between official documented narratives and the operational realities of policy-making. Recognizing this limitation, the research nonetheless seeks to make a substantive contribution in understanding the complexity of conceptual and institutional challenges in the integration of theoretical knowledge into Indonesian foreign policy practice. The theoretical framework that will be used by the author is the one developed by Alexander George. George identifies three types of knowledge (knowledge base) that can help policymakers to decide whether and how to use certain strategies. Scholarships from academics, researchers, intelligence specialists in government, and other analysts are the main way to gather this type of knowledge. The three types of knowledge are: *(1) the abstract or general conceptual model of a strategy; (2) general (or generic) knowledge of the conditions that favor the success of a strategy and, conversely, the conditions that make its success impossible (the identification of 'favoring conditions'); (3) actor-specific (idiosyncratic) behavior and adversary-specific behavior models (the idiosyncrasy of the country or the adversary)* (George, 1993).

An abstract conceptual model of a strategy, such as deterrence, coercive diplomacy, crisis management, cessation of war, *détente*, appeasement, dispute resolution, or cooperation, identifies the essential variables and overarching rationale for its effective implementation. Deterrence theory emphasizes the potential to retaliate against actions contrary to the state's interests, which requires a credible and formidable threat to convince an opponent that the potential costs and harms outweigh the anticipated benefits (George, 1993). Abstract models can be used for other tactics, but they are not a strategy. The models provide a foundation for formulating and executing plans, but do not prescribe actions to incorporate logic into the opponent's calculations. To adapt the model into a concrete strategy, policymakers must fit each variable component into a specific strategy. Moreover, abstract conceptual models are not comprehensive deductive theories, which can be used to predict the success or failure of tactics in a given context (George, 1993)

The effectiveness of abstract conceptual models can be partially reduced by recognizing factors that increase the likelihood of strategy success. General knowledge can be gained through empirical research that compares successful strategy implementations with those that fail. Conditional generalizations, or laws, describe factors that facilitate strategy success and factors that correlate with the likelihood of failure (George, 1993). These generalizations are more advantageous in policy-making than probabilistic relationships without specifying conditions. The effectiveness of foreign policy-making tactics will depend on a variety of factors, and no single causal pattern can explain all successes or failures. Making conditional generalizations is not an easy research endeavor, but through further evaluation of historical experience, it is possible to identify factors that can increase or increase the probability of conflict (George, 1993).

Conditional generalization is a set of assumptions that can be used to predict the outcome of a conflict. It can be used in conflict mediation, negotiation, deterrence, and coercive diplomacy. A crisis will be conducive to mediation when the parties realize the impasse and decide that unilateral action is no longer possible (George, 1993). The prenegotiation conditions found that conditions such as imminent disaster, belief that negotiation is preferable, potential obstacles in formal discussions, and belief that prenegotiation will lead to favorable outcomes can increase negotiation success. Thus, generating conditional generalizations about trust-building measures, which can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of specific strategies in specific contexts (George, 1993). Policymakers need an accurate perception of the adversary to engage effectively with other countries. This involves seeing events and actions from the adversary's point of view, which

can lead to misunderstandings and misjudgments. Inaccurate portrayals can result in fatal irrationality, policy mistakes, preventable disasters, and lost opportunities (George, 1993).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The gap between theory and practice in foreign policy is a condition that has long been a concern of international relations scholars and diplomacy practitioners. This phenomenon reflects the complexity of the relationship between two communities that should complement each other but often operate in separate domains. In the global context, it has been identified early that cultural differences between academia and policymakers have hindered the development of international relations theory by academics and the use of this knowledge by practitioners (George, 1993). This gap is not simply a communication problem, but reflects a fundamental divergence in orientation, values, and priorities between those who study theory and those responsible for implementing policy. A similar situation is evident in Indonesia's foreign policy landscape, where interactions between the academic community and the diplomatic bureaucracy have not been productive. Exploring the possible challenges Indonesia will face in trying to bridge this gap is a crucial step towards strengthening the foundations of foreign policy in Indonesia.

The Challenges of Cultural Differences and Orientations

The first and most fundamental challenge in bridging the gap between Indonesian foreign policy theory and practice lies in the epistemic cultural differences between the academic community and the policy-making community. These two communities operate with different orientations, time frames, and measures of success. Academics tend to pursue comprehensive knowledge and theoretical nuances, while practitioners prefer analysis that is relevant to the often time-constrained decision-making context. According to Sukma, there is a significant gap between the production of knowledge in the academic environment and its utilization in the bureaucratic environment of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Academics and diplomats often operate in different epistemic spaces with orientations and priorities that do not always align. This phenomenon can be seen in several concrete cases, such as when discussing Indonesia's approach to the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. On the one hand, academics develop a theoretical study on the implications of geopolitical transformation for Indonesia's posture. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must respond to these dynamics with tactical decisions within a limited time frame. This difference in orientation results in situation where academic research on Indonesia's Indo-Pacific policy is often generated after policy decisions have been made, rather than being the inputs that shape the decision-making process itself (Sukma, 2012).

These epistemic cultural differences are further complicated by the existence of different institutional expectations and incentives. In Indonesia's academic environment, the incentive for international publication and the development of theoretical frameworks is often greater than the incentive to produce analysis that is directly relevant to policymakers. The award system in Indonesian universities tends to lead international relations academics to prioritize publication in international theoretical journals rather than a direct approach with policymakers (Roberts et al., 2014). On the other hand, Indonesian diplomats and policymakers are required to respond to international dynamics responsively and often without the luxury of time to consult relevant academic literature. These dynamic forms two communities that move in different orbits despite sharing a concern for the same subject. Although academics and international relations practitioners share concerns over the same issue, these two groups rarely interact in forums that allow for a substantive and ongoing exchange of ideas.

A. Epistemological Challenges in Understanding Knowledge

The second challenge has to do with differences in perceptions of knowledge that are considered valuable. Indonesian international relations academics tend to develop studies that focus on abstract theoretical frameworks, while policymakers need analysis that can be directly operationalized. According to Anwar, there is a dissonance between the theoretical discourse on Indonesian foreign policy in the academic environment and the pragmatic needs of policymakers (Anwar, 2020). Academic studies of the 'free-active' principle tend to focus on constructing conceptual arguments without offering clear operational recommendations. This epistemological gap is clearly visible in the discourse on the development of Indonesian foreign policy doctrine.

Meanwhile, academics often try to provide a conceptual study of the theoretical meaning of a nomenclature of policy vision. Instead, policymakers need operational guidance on how to implement the vision on relevant issues. This shows the difficulty in translating conceptual studies from the theoretical domain into a coherent and systematic foreign policy strategy. This divergence creates a situation in which theoretical developments are not fully utilized in policy formulation, which can be assumed to be pragmatic. The epistemological disparities that can be identified in the domain of Indonesia's foreign policy reflect the imperfect consolidation of knowledge between the theoretical and practical domains. Policy practitioners in Indonesia often put forward a realist-pragmatic paradigm that relies on the logic of short-term national interests, while academic groups tend to offer a more diverse framework of analysis with an emphasis on theories of international relations.

This epistemological gap is increasingly evident when faced with regional issues that require in-depth analysis. Indonesia's foreign policy is often burdened by inconsistencies between rhetoric and implementation that are partly rooted in the inability to integrate theoretical knowledge into policy formulation (Novotny, 2010). This situation reflects the fundamental challenge of presenting an epistemological dialogue between the academic domain and policymakers in Indonesia, where the production of theoretical knowledge does not always correlate with the practical needs of diplomats and policy planners. In line with the above findings, Anwar argues that the hierarchical and procedural character of Indonesia's diplomatic bureaucracy often creates structural barriers to the assimilation of academic knowledge into the policy formulation process (Anwar, 2014). This condition reflects the epistemological inconsistency in Indonesia's foreign policy knowledge ecosystem, where analytical-systematic academic studies often do not find an adequate place in the policy formulation process that tends to be pragmatic and short-term oriented.

B. Language and Communication Challenges

The third challenge relates to the use of language and terminology that is often a barrier to effective communication between academics and Indonesian foreign policy practitioners. Academics tend to use complex theoretical terminology and conceptual nuances that policymakers may not fully understand. Instead, policymakers often use bureaucratic language and political considerations that may seem too simplistic to academics. The language used in academic publications on international relations in Indonesia is often not in line with the needs of policymakers. Complex theoretical terminology is rarely translated into operable practical guidelines in foreign policy-making (Roberts et al., 2014). This linguistic gap creates significant communication barriers, where valuable potential theoretical insights are not effectively conveyed to those who can leverage them in the policy process.

This condition creates a paradoxical situation where studies produced by Indonesian

academics on Indonesia's foreign policy are more accessible to the international community than those by local policymakers who are the target audience. This linguistic gap is a challenge that needs to be addressed if we want to bridge the gap between theories and practices in Indonesia's foreign policy. Linguistic barriers in communication between the theoretical and practical domains concern not only complex academic terminology but also fundamental differences in discourse structures and argumentation patterns. These structural differences create difficulties in translating academic insights into policy considerations. For example, academics tend to discuss the conceptual and structural implications of the doctrine of the 'World Maritime Axis', while policymakers are more interested in the analysis of its practical implementation. The mismatch between the analytical depth offered by academics and the operational knowledge needs required by policymakers creates a situation where both communities speak the same language but with different grammars, thus hindering effective knowledge transfer between the two.

C. The Challenge of Accurate Representation of External Actors

The fourth challenge relates to the difficulty in developing an accurate understanding of the motivations and behaviors of external actors relevant to Indonesia's foreign policy. Alexander George emphasized that policymakers need accurate perceptions of opponents to make effective foreign policy (George, 1993). However, in practice, Indonesia often faces challenges in accurately analyzing the behavior and intentions of the countries with which it interacts. According to Fitriani, Indonesia has faced a challenge of perception in evaluating China's strategic intentions in the South China Sea (Fitriani, 2018). The failure to accurately analyze the motivations behind China's behavior has resulted in policies that are not always optimal in protecting Indonesia's national interests. Similar challenges may also arise in Indonesia's efforts to understand the position and strategy of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, or related to Russia in the conflict/annexation of Ukraine.

The limitations in producing an accurate picture of external actors are also complicated by the complexity of the relationship between domestic and international dimensions in the reading of actors' behavior. Indonesian policymakers often face the dilemma of interpreting the motivations of major countries, for example, in the context of the rivalry between the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific (Laksmana, 2020). The perception of the Indonesian elite towards the strategic competition between the two countries tends to be influenced by domestic political preferences, which causes bias in the analysis of the intentions of the two actors. Hamilton-Hart further argues that Indonesia's foreign policy-making process in response to regional dynamics is often hampered by perceived gaps between various government agencies that provide different interpretations of the intentions of external actors (Hamilton-Hart, 2009). The challenge of producing an accurate picture of external actors is further complicated by institutional limitations in collecting and processing strategic information. This condition results in a dissonance between empirical phenomena and policy interpretation, this institutional challenge reflects a broader capacity gap in Indonesia's foreign policy analysis ecosystem, resulting in a partial understanding of the motivations and strategies of key actors in the region, as argued by Connelly who specifically takes an example of Indonesian policy in the era of President Joko Widodo's leadership (Connelly, 2014).

Challenges of Abstract Theoretical Model Limitations

The fifth challenge relates to the limitations of abstract theoretical models in providing operational guidance for Indonesia's foreign policy. According to George, the abstract conceptual model is not a comprehensive deductive theory but a model that can be used to predict the success or failure of a foreign policy tactic (George, 1993). This challenge is complicated by the tendency of Indonesian academics to adopt theoretical frameworks developed in the Western context without adequate adaptation to local realities. According to Fitriani, the theory of international relations that develops in Indonesia is often still heavily influenced by Western conceptual frameworks, which do not always correspond to the historical experience and political realities of the region (Fitriani, 2022). This tendency then has implications for the theoretical model adopted that may not fully reflect the complexity and nuances of Indonesia's foreign policy.

The limitations of abstract theoretical models in Indonesia's foreign policy formulation are also reflected in the discourse on Indonesia's regionalism approach in ASEAN. According to Acharya, although there are already concepts from the academic domain, such as the ASEAN security community and regional identity, the practical application of Indonesia's foreign policy is considered hampered by the inability to translate these theoretical models into foreign policy operational strategies (Acharya, 2017). This is evident in Indonesia's tendency to rely on different or non-different approaches based on a coherent theoretical framework in managing regional security challenges. The conceptual abstraction of the concept of regionalism developed through studies in the academic and theoretical domains seems to be disconnected from the reality of diplomatic practice that is more pragmatic in the international political situation (Emmerson, 2017). This condition reflects the gap between idealistic/supposedly utopian theoretical constructions and the reality of complex policy-making and is often influenced by non-theoretical factors such as short-term national interests and domestic political pressures.

Another challenge that can be identified in the use of theoretical models in foreign policy is the tendency to adopt concepts developed in different political contexts without adequate adaptation. As Acharya and Buzan argue, the dominant theories of international relations today are still derived from Western intellectual traditions that are not always in harmony with the socio-political realities of Southeast Asia (Acharya & Buzan, 2017). Indonesia is no exception, with socio-political, historical, and cultural factors that are different from the West. This gap also allows for a wider gap due to the orientation of Indonesian academics who tend to prioritize publication targets as job demands rather than the contribution and significance of research to the needs of policy-making in Indonesia, creating a situation where the production of theoretical knowledge and its practical application move in separate orbits. As a consequence, theoretical models developed in the theoretical domain often find it difficult to apply them as a reference in making evidence-based foreign policy.

Structural and Institutional Challenges

The gap between theory and practice in Indonesia's foreign policy reflects the systemic problems facing Indonesia's knowledge sector as a whole. In analyzing the challenges of the gap between theory and practice, it is important to understand the unique characteristics of the knowledge ecosystem in Indonesia. According to Pellini, the knowledge sector is defined as the institutional landscape of government, private sector, and civil society organizations that provide research and analysis to support public policy development (Pellini et al., 2018b). The knowledge sector is horizontal, not under a single ministry, where the evidence and research generated can be used by various stakeholders, including governments, advocacy organizations, and the wider

community through the media. The gap in theory and practice in foreign policy is also related to structural challenges in the Indonesian bureaucracy. The planning and budgeting process in Indonesia is quite rigid, and the tendency is to only add new policies on top of existing ones which then have implications for policymakers' behavior to focus more on fulfilling administrative requirements than on the quality of policies that will improve the welfare of their citizens (Jackson et al., 2018).

Another significant obstacle is the limited capacity of individuals in the bureaucracy to seek and use research evidence. Jackson *et al* emphasize that finding, evaluating, and using evidence in policymaking requires a wide range of high-level cognitive skills that are not fully produced by the Indonesian education system (Jackson et al., 2018). This challenge is particularly relevant to the context of foreign policy, where the complexity of international issues requires a high analytical capacity. Although senior officials in ministries generally have higher education, including in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the rotation of positions every three years, as mentioned in the study, inhibits the accumulation of in-depth sectoral knowledge (Jackson et al., 2018). The use of evidence in foreign policy is also influenced by broader political factors. Different actors hold different values and base their actions on different belief systems that influence how evidence is used in the policy process, sometimes as ammunition to win arguments or even hidden to simplify decision-making (Jackson et al., 2018). This political factor is very relevant in the context of Indonesia's foreign policy, which must balance various domestic and international interests. At the systemic level, the main challenge is the lack of effective mechanisms for integrating academic knowledge into decision-making processes. The lack of space for knowledge exchange between academics and policymakers is a significant obstacle (Prasetyamartati, Carden, Ruhanawati, et al., 2018). To address this gap, they suggest the development of exchange platforms or *knowledge hubs* to facilitate interaction between various stakeholders within the knowledge sector. In foreign policy, the development of such mechanisms can strengthen the integration of theoretical perspectives into the policy process.

Another crucial challenge in the Indonesian knowledge system is the norms and values related to the use of evidence. The evolution of Indonesia's knowledge sector in the past was characterized by low accountability and *top-down* decision-making with a very limited evidence base, and it has moved to a more decentralized governance environment with a more developed evidence base (Pellini et al., 2018b). However, this shift is still in the process, and as Pellini expresses, the development of a strong culture of inquiry is still a challenge in the Indonesian context, where it is generally unacceptable to challenge authority despite the culture of criticism and protest that has emerged in some segments of the population (Pellini et al., 2018a). Positive reform measures have begun to be seen in terms of a supportive environment for *evidence-based policy-making* (Prasetyamartati, Carden, & Sugiyanto, 2018). Regulatory changes, such as the establishment of the Indonesian Science Fund and the revision of research procurement regulations, show progress in overcoming structural barriers. However, the implementation of these reforms in the context of foreign policy requires a more adaptive and responsive approach to the complexities of international politics.

The challenges that have been identified have significant implications for the effectiveness of Indonesia's foreign policy. When the gap between theory and practice is not effectively bridged, foreign policy risks becoming less coherent, reactive than anticipatory, and less supported by deep contextual understanding. This can result in sub-optimal policy responses to regional and global challenges, such as the dynamics of great power competition in the Indo-Pacific.

Beyond The Barriers: Theory-Practice Gaps and Pathway to Integrate

The six challenges identified in this study should not be viewed as isolated phenomena but rather as an interconnected ecosystem of barriers that collectively impede the effective integration of theoretical knowledge into Indonesian foreign policy practice. This systemic perspective reveals how these challenges interact and amplify each other, creating a complex web of constraints that requires coordinated interventions across multiple domains.

The cultural and epistemological divergences between academics and policymakers create foundational conditions that directly intensify language and communication barriers. As Sukma (2012) argues, when academic and policy communities operate with fundamentally different worldviews about what constitutes valuable knowledge, they develop distinct communicative practices that hinder meaningful exchange. For instance, Indonesia's academic discourse on free-active foreign policy principles often remains abstract and conceptual, while policymakers seek concrete operational guidance—creating a translation gap between theoretical formulations and policy applications.

These disconnected communication subsequently undermine the capacity to accurately analyze external actors. When theoretical models developed by academics cannot be effectively communicated to policymakers, Indonesia's foreign policy establishment loses valuable analytical frameworks for interpreting the complex motivations of regional powers. This dynamic was evident in Indonesia's response to China's assertiveness in the South China Sea, where there is a perception gaps between academic analyses and policy interpretations of China strategic intentions.

Perhaps, structural-institutional constraints function as systemic amplifiers of all other challenges. The hierarchical character of Indonesia's diplomatic bureaucracy, combined with misaligned incentive structures in academia, creates what Hamilton-Hart (2009) characterizes as 'institutional silos' that prevent knowledge flow between theoretical and practical domains. These structural barriers directly limit the development and application of policy-relevant theoretical models, as the institutional environment provides few opportunities or rewards for collaborative knowledge creation between academics and practitioners.

Addressing these interconnected challenges requires multidimensional solutions that target both specific barriers and systemic conditions. First, Indonesia could establish formalized knowledge brokerage mechanisms that serve as translation interfaces between academic research and policy needs. An institutional bridges could include regular policy forums, embedded academic positions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and diplomatic fellowships for foreign policy scholars.

Second, reforming incentive structures within both academic and policy institutions could address the fundamental cultural and epistemological divides. As Roberts et al. (2014) argue, Indonesian universities could revise promotion criteria to reward policy-relevant research and practitioner engagement, while diplomatic career paths could value academic collaboration and theoretical sophistication. These aligned incentives would gradually transform the epistemic cultures of both communities toward more productive interaction.

Third, developing specialized knowledge integration capabilities within Indonesia's foreign policy establishment could directly enhance analytical capacity. Indonesia could establish a dedicated strategic analysis unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that employs both academic specialists and experienced diplomats working in collaborative teams on emerging regional challenges. This approach has proven effective in countries like Singapore, where the integration of theoretical and practical expertise has

strengthened foreign policy responses to complex geopolitical shifts in the Indo-Pacific region.

Finally, creating shared conceptual frameworks specifically adapted to Indonesian strategic realities could address the limitations of abstract theoretical models. As Acharya & Buzan (2017) suggest, developing theoretical perspectives that relevant to a country historical experiences and strategic culture would provide more relevant analytical tools for policymakers while engaging academics in practically-oriented theoretical innovation. This approach would directly target the overreliance on Western conceptual frameworks that do not fully capture Indonesia's histories and experiences.

By understanding these challenges as an interconnected system and implementing coordinated interventions across multiple dimensions, Indonesia has the potential to significantly strengthen the relationship between foreign policy theory and practice. This integration is not merely an academic exercise but a strategic necessity for enhancing Indonesia's capacity to navigate an increasingly complex regional environment with greater foresight, coherence, and effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia faces significant challenges in trying to bridge the gap between theory and practice in foreign policy making. These challenges include cultural and orientation differences between the academic and policy-making communities; epistemological gaps in the understanding of knowledge; language and communication barriers; difficulties in developing an accurate picture of external actors; limitations of abstract theoretical models; and structural and institutional challenges in Indonesia's knowledge ecosystem. These gaps are not simply communication problems, but rather reflect fundamental divergences in values, priorities, and timeframes between the two communities.

The implications of this gap have the potential to result in a foreign policy that is less coherent, more reactive than anticipatory, and not supported by deep contextual understanding. These conditions present significant risks for Indonesia in navigating an increasingly complex geopolitical environment, especially in responding to regional and global dynamics such as great power competition in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite positive developments in institutional reform, fundamental challenges in epistemic culture and knowledge integration mechanisms still require special attention. To bridge this gap, a comprehensive approach is needed, including the development of knowledge exchange platforms, reform of institutional incentives, and strengthening analytical capacity within Indonesia's foreign policy bureaucracy. The development of theoretical models that are more adaptive to the Indonesian context is also needed to ensure the relevance and applicability of theory in policy practice. Thus, efforts to bridge the gap between theory and practice are not just an academic interest but a strategic necessity to strengthen the foundation of Indonesia's foreign policy in the face of the increasing complexity of global challenges.

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