

Whither Indonesia's Indo-Pacific Strategy?



Yohanes SULAIMAN

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Executive Summary

This paper analyzes Indonesia's overall Indo-Pacific strategy from the Yudhoyono to the Jokowi Administration by examining various domestic considerations and their implications.

It argues that Indonesia's Indo-Pacific strategy is driven less by a coherent national strategy than by a choice made due to the lack of alternatives resulting from Indonesia's domestic and international weaknesses and their implications. This results in Indonesia seeing itself as the key balancer in the region.

Indonesia's sole goal is, in essence, to avoid being dragged into conflict that would threaten its bargaining power, while at the same time, maintaining the status quo in the region to preserve its bargaining power. Therefore, Indonesia takes a multilateral institutional approach that it hopes will lower tensions in the region and maintain the status quo both in the region and domestically.

In terms of policy implications, the major take-aways are as follows:

- Indonesia's Indo-Pacific policy lacks anything concrete beyond more economic and social-cultural cooperation.
- In the case of growing tension in the Indo-Pacific region, there is simply no possibility that Indonesia will join any military pact or work with others to contain China or other countries militarily.
- For Indonesia, the solution for any tension is more cooperation and more diplomacy to achieve a consensus that would put Indonesia as a key player in the Indo-Pacific region.

Résumé

Cette note présente les facteurs de politique intérieure qui sous-tendent la stratégie indo-pacifique de l'Indonésie sous les administrations Yudhoyono et Jokowi. L'auteur explique que cette stratégie est moins le résultat d'une décision cohérente que la conséquence d'une absence d'alternatives, compte tenu des contraintes domestiques et internationales qui pèsent sur le pays.

L'Indonésie se voit donc contrainte à se positionner comme une puissance stabilisatrice. Son seul objectif est de préserver sa position de force en maintenant le statu quo régional en termes d'équilibre des puissances et en évitant d'être entraîné dans un conflit contre son gré.

Dans cette optique, l'approche indonésienne soutient le multilatéralisme institutionnel dans l'espoir de limiter les tensions régionales et maintenir le statu quo tant au niveau régional que national. Ainsi :

- La politique « indo-pacifique » de l'Indonésie ne voit pas de concrétisation au-delà de la coopération économique et socio-culturelle.
- Dans le contexte d'une montée des tensions au niveau régional, il est inconcevable que l'Indonésie se joigne à un pacte militaire quelconque ou travaille avec d'autres partenaires afin d'endiguer la Chine ou d'autres pays sur le plan militaire.
- Pour l'Indonésie, la solution face à toute tension consiste en davantage de coopération et de diplomatie afin de forger un consensus qui la placerait comme un acteur central dans la région indo-pacifique.

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Introduction

On August 2, 2018, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi presented Indonesia's Indo-Pacific concept to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministerial Meeting, in which she stressed the need to reaffirm "an ASEAN-centric regional architecture that is open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based", and that such cooperation should be based on "ASEAN centrality." The reason is that, in the past 50 years, "ASEAN's existence has never threatened others" because ASEAN has always prioritized "inclusiveness, cooperation, and habit of dialogue."¹

Such a proposal is consistent with Indonesia's foreign policy strategy in general: a desire to maintain regional stability by strengthening cooperation, especially in the economic sector, and focusing on dialogue to settle discords, instead of relying on military alliances. This is especially true in regard to growing tension in the Indo-Pacific region due to the increasing assertiveness of China.

For Indonesian policy-makers, the growing tension and instability threaten to drag the region into a war they have no wish to get involved in and that would be a threat to economic growth. More importantly, it would basically open the region further to growing influence and interference by outside powers – notably China and the United States. In turn, this would threaten Indonesia's leadership and influence in the region, especially in Southeast Asia, as Indonesia considers Southeast Asia as its sphere of influence due to the centrality of its geopolitical situation.

This paper analyzes Indonesia's overall Indo-Pacific strategy from Yudhoyono to Jokowi Administration. It explains why Indonesia's approach is driven less by a coherent national Indo-Pacific strategy than by a choice made due to the lack of alternatives, due to Indonesia's domestic and international weaknesses, and their implications. And it argues that this approach consists essentially of old wine in a new bottle. It also argues that current Widodo administration's Indo-Pacific strategy, which, in the beginning seems to show a more unilateral approach, ends up as a continuation of Yudhoyono's multilateral approach.

The author would like to thank Asrudin Azwar, Sophie Boisseau du Rocher, Evan A. Laksmna, Iing Nurdin, and Colonel Victor Tobing for their helpful insights and assistance.

1. "ASEAN crafts position on US 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy,'" *Nikkei Asian Review*, August 2, 2018.

Indonesia's Strategy and Its Indo-Pacific Calculations

Even though Indonesia is concerned with growing tension in the Indo-Pacific region and debate on the Indo-Pacific concept, for Indonesian policy-makers the solution is “strong positive cooperation” based on mutual understanding rather than reaction to regional developments based on “perception of threat.”² As Evan Laksmana observed, Indonesia is trying to replicate its historical success with ASEAN and UN institutions,³ whereby it manages to play a central role in maintaining peace and exerting its influence.

Regional stability prioritized through multilateral institution-building

It is a well-tried strategy that has often provided the best outcome for Indonesia, at low cost. The country faces the thorny issue of the growing power of China and its willingness to start wielding it, as in the South China Sea, and the backlashes from concerned states, such as Japan, India, and the United States. In that context, the best policy for Indonesia is to maintain the stability of the region by trying to foster more cooperation, hoping that the growing ties of multilateral economic and cultural cooperation will reduce regional tensions, while downplaying any attempt to craft a regional counterbalance against China.

At the same time, it could be argued that Indonesia's reliance on multilateral institution-building is due to the fact that it lacks a coherent Indo-Pacific policy – a coherent national Indo-Pacific policy that unites and integrates resources from various departments, notably the foreign and defense ministries, and the armed forces – and that this sends mixed signals to other countries in the region, and causes confusion.

This situation is due to the unwillingness of successive Indonesian presidents to prioritize the creation of a national security strategy that

2. R. L. P. Marsudi, “2018 Annual Press Statement of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia H. E. Retno L. P. Marsudi,” *Ministry for Foreign Affairs*, January 9, 2018, p. 13, available at: www.kemlu.go.id.

3. E. Laksmana, “An Indo-Pacific Construct with ‘Indonesian characteristics,’” *The Strategist*, February 6, 2018, available at: www.aspistrategist.org.au.

would craft a united national policy. The three main reasons for this are, first, the fragmentation of the national government itself; each national ministry is divvied up between political parties and milked for patronage resources by them, and thus ministers tend to compete against each other instead of cooperating.⁴

Second, economically, Indonesia desires Chinese investment, and is thus wary of taking actions that might jeopardize the relationship between Indonesia and China. As a result, Indonesia is simply passing the buck to ASEAN by stressing its centrality in the India-Pacific region. And, since ASEAN is well known for its indecisiveness and inefficiency due to its requirement for a unanimous vote on any major decision,⁵ Indonesia's decision is tantamount to doing nothing and, instead, preserving the current status quo.

The third reason is the problem of Indonesia's own power-projecting capability. Militarily, Indonesia is too weak to challenge China, while, at the same time, its strategic culture, which focuses more on internal security, self-reliance and self-strengthening, prevents it from taking part in an active military alliance that would contain China.⁶ And any attempt by the government to reorient the military from inward- to outward-looking would most likely invite a backlash, especially from the powerful army.⁷

A confusing strategy

Not surprisingly, Indonesia's lack of policy causes confusion both internally and internationally. Take the example of the recent development in the India-Indonesia relationship. On May 17, 2018, during a visit to India in preparation for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Indonesia, Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and a close confidant of President Joko Widodo, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, was reported to agree on boosting both military and economic cooperation with India, including giving India "economic and military access to the strategic island of Sabang, which, he touted, was good for all vessels, 'including

4. E. Aspinall, "A Nation in Fragments," *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 1, January 28, 2013, p. 35.

5. M. McDonald, "Indecision and Infighting: That's the Asean Way," *The New York Times*, November 20, 2012, available at: [rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/20/asia/asean-way.html).

6. Y. Sulaiman, "Indonesia's Strategic Culture: The Legacy of Independence," in: M. Wills, A. J. Tellis, and A. Szalwinski, *Strategic Asia 2016-17: Understanding Strategic Culture in the Asia-Pacific*, Washington, D.C.: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2016, p. 186.

7. J. Herlijanto, "The Current State of Military Reform in Indonesia: Interview with Lieutenant General (Retired) Agus Widjojo (Part 1)," *ISEAS Perspective*, December 15, 2017, pp. 6-7, available at: www.iseas.edu.sg.

submarines.”⁸ This offer was important since Sabang is located at the northern tip of the island of Sumatra and at the mouth of the strategically important Malacca Strait, which could allow India to intercept Chinese vessels travelling between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

This inadvertently caused strong responses, especially in India and China. Before Modi's visit, *Global Times*, a Chinese government-affiliated news site, published an editorial that declared that China would pay attention to “possible military cooperation between India and Indonesia at Sabang” and warned India about engaging in “a strategic competition with China that would cause it to eventually burn its own fingers.”⁹ *The Times of India*, in the aftermath of Modi's visit to Jakarta, brandished a headline stating: “India's coastline now ‘extends’ from Seychelles to Indonesia” and declared that Modi had managed to get Indian “military access” to Sabang Port.¹⁰

However, the military aspect of cooperation regarding the island of Sabang was not mentioned at all in the India-Indonesia joint statement issued in the aftermath of Modi's visit to Jakarta on May 30, 2018. Instead, it simply noted “the decision to set up a Joint Task Force to undertake projects for port-related infrastructure in and around Sabang” and it was put under “Comprehensive Economic Partnership,” not “Strategic Engagement.”¹¹ In fact, in Indonesia, the news media coverage of Luhut Pandjaitan's visit did not even mention the military aspect of potential India-Indonesia cooperation in developing the port of Sabang – only India's interests in investing in Sabang to develop a hospital and its port.¹² There was no discussion at all about giving the Indian navy access to the port.

In essence, both China and India misunderstood Indonesia's policies and intention concerning the Indo-Pacific region. As noted above, Indonesia has never had any interest in building military alliances, let alone allowing India, or any other country in the world, to have full military access (e.g. military bases) on its territory. Rather, Indonesia is focusing on multilateral institution-building as its main strategy in the Indo-Pacific

8. P. P. Chaudhuri, “Indonesia Gives India Access to Strategic Port of Sabang,” *Hindustan Times*, May 17, 2018, available at: www.hindustantimes.com.

9. W. J. Hu, “Investment in Indonesia's Sabang Port Will Be Test of India's Diplomatic Wisdom,” *Global Times*, May 28, 2018, available at: www.globaltimes.cn.

10. “India's Coastline Now ‘Extends’ from Seychelles to Indonesia,” *Times of India*, June 1, 2018, available at: timesofindia.indiatimes.com.

11. “India-Indonesia Joint Statement during visit of Prime Minister to Indonesia (May 30, 2018),” *Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India*, May 30, 2018, available at: www.mea.gov.in.

12. Agustiyanti, “Menko Luhut Sebut India Lirik Investasi di Sabang [Coordinating Minister Luhut mentions India's interest in investing in Sabang],” *CNN Indonesia*, May 18, 2018, available at: www.cnnindonesia.com.

region, through strengthening “cooperation among all countries with Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean coast,” with ASEAN as the key player in developing the framework of cooperation¹³ – which is, in essence, the default ad-hoc policy.

13. M. A. Sapiie, “Indonesia Wants ASEAN to Take Central Role in Developing Indo-Pacific Cooperation,” *The Jakarta Post*, April 29, 2018, available at: www.thejakartapost.com.

Indo-Pacific Strategy under the Yudhoyono Administration

The term Indo-Pacific was first mentioned in a speech by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in the Indian Parliament in August 2007, with the title of “Confluence of the Two Seas,” which suggested a “dynamic coupling” of both the Pacific and Indian Oceans and a “broader Asia” that would include both the United States and Australia.¹⁴ This speech was motivated by Japan’s growing concern about China’s increasing power and influence in the region, and its intentions in the East China Sea. To balance China’s growing threat, Japan decided on crafting a broader security framework, by engaging China’s other rivals beyond the traditional regional security framework, and notably India – despite China’s protest.¹⁵

Indonesia’s proposal for a dynamic equilibrium

Since then, the idea has gained prominence all over the world, including in Indonesia – but with a marked difference. While Shinzo Abe’s concept of the Indo-Pacific was an attempt to counter China’s growing presence and influence in Eurasia and Africa by working with India to create a “free and open Indo-Pacific,”¹⁶ Marty Natalegawa, then Indonesian Foreign Minister, took a different tack. He saw that the rising power of China and the corresponding change in the balance of power in the region should not be seen only as a problem that would be a cause for regional instability, but rather as an opportunity to enhance cooperation.

Using the concept of dynamic equilibrium, he argued that change in the balance of power should be seen as natural, constant, and inevitable. Rather than being seen as a threat, such change should be considered as a positive development that could lead to opportunities for more cooperation

14. R. Mukherjee, “Commentary: The Indo-Pacific, a Security Diamond, a 10-year Quad?” *Channel News Asia*, November 10, 2017, available at: www.channelnewsasia.com.

15. E. Chanlett-Avery, “Japan, Indo-Pacific, and the Quad,” *The Chicago Council of Global Affairs*, February 14, 2018, available at: www.thechicagocouncil.org.

16. T. Kotani, “Can the ‘Indo-Pacific’ Compete with China?”, *The Japan Times*, January 10, 2018, available at: www.japantimes.co.jp.

in diverse areas, such as in economics, which should be managed through a comprehensive approach that would foster “a virtuous circle of confidence-building steps” that recognize the interlinkages between political and security issues and economic and social issues.¹⁷

In the context of the “Indo-Pacific”, Natalegawa stressed that challenges in this region – which spanned “two oceans, the Pacific and Indian Oceans, bounded by Japan in the north, Australia in the Southeast, and India in the Southwest” – stemmed from a “trust deficit,” “worst-case assumptions of others’ intentions” that led to deepening distrust, and to the “sense of inevitability of conflict.” Indonesia, located at the center of the region, had the responsibility to maintain regional stability, to position itself in the forefront of global diplomacy to maintain peace, with a central role as a “norm-setter,” “consensus-builder” and “peacekeeper.”¹⁸ As a result, Indonesia’s policy was to engage in “aggressively waging peace,”¹⁹ building diplomatic relations with virtually every member of the United Nations (except with Israel, due to domestic complications).²⁰

For Indonesia to promote peace, the solution was to increase trust through “mutual restraint” and by working towards “an Indo-Pacific wide treaty of friendship and cooperation,” with each state in the region committed to “solve disputes by peaceful means, and to promote a concept of security that is all encompassing.” In other words, rather than challenging the growing power of China, Indonesia should try to integrate and accommodate China into the existing system, spreading the norm of mutual restraint to China and thus boosting trust among nations in the Indo-Pacific region. And, learning from the success of ASEAN, which managed to bring peace to a “region that was once marked by inter-state rivalry,” the Indo-Pacific region should also engage in community-building.²¹

The South China Sea's limits

Thus, in trying to solve the disputes in the South China Sea, Indonesia pursued multilateral approaches to deal with China by stressing the centrality of ASEAN, and trying to persuade China to agree to a code of

17. M. Natalegawa, “Waging Aggressive Peace: ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific,” *Strategic Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2, November-December 2011, pp. 44-45.

18. A. Acharya, *Indonesia Matters: Asia's Emerging Democratic Power*, New Jersey: World Scientific, 2015, pp. 9-10.

19. M. Natalegawa, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 42.

20. “Indonesia Buka 21 Hubungan Diplomatik 2011 [Indonesia opens 21 Diplomatic Relationships in 2011],” *Antara News*, January 7, 2011, available at: www.antaraneews.com.

21. M. Natalegawa, “An Indonesian Perspective on the Indo-Pacific,” *The Jakarta Post*, May 20, 2013, available at: www.thejakartapost.com.

conduct with ASEAN to provide rules of engagement between China and ASEAN to settle disputes as a part of the confidence-building process.²²

Marty Natalegawa's concept of the Indo-Pacific was compatible with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's own foreign policy outlook of "a million friends and zero enemies" foreign policy. The idea was roughly defined as Indonesia's efforts to engage in strategic partnerships with as many countries as possible, with the logic that the more friends you have, the more secure your country will be.²³

Yudhoyono believed that the strategic environment that Indonesia faced was highly positive, as "no country perceives Indonesia as an enemy" and there was "no country which Indonesia considers an enemy."²⁴ This idea of an "all-direction foreign policy", whereby Indonesia would have "a thousand friends and zero enemies,"²⁵ set Indonesia as a global actor, with Yudhoyono playing the key role, rather than the foreign ministry. Yudhoyono relished attention, wanted respect from world leaders, whom he believed valued and praised his accomplishments, and was thus keen on attending to international issues. This included paying close personal attention to ASEAN.

A case in point was the failed ASEAN talks in 2012, when the organization failed to issue its usual joint communiqué, a first in its history, due to the refusal by Cambodia to allow the communiqué to mention "bilateral disputes" concerning the South China Sea.²⁶ In response, Yudhoyono ordered Natalegawa to try to fix the problem. This led to the agreement on a common position on the South China Sea that reiterated ASEAN's adherence to the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.²⁷

At the same time, despite both Natalegawa's and Yudhoyono's focus on foreign policy, it is difficult to see that there was any breakthrough in

22. M. J. Valencia, "Navigating Differences: What the 'Zero Draft' Code of Conduct for the South China Sea Says (and Doesn't Say)," *Global Asia*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Spring 2013, p. 72, available at: www.globalasia.org.

23. S. B. Yudhoyono, "Pidato Lengkap Presiden SBY 20 Oktober 2009 [Complete Speech of President SBY 20 October 2009]," *Kompas*, October 20, 2009, available at: sains.kompas.com.

24. "SBY's Inaugural Speech: The Text," *The Jakarta Globe*, October 20, 2009, available at: jakartaglobe.id.

25. S. B. Yudhoyono, "Indonesia and America: A 21ST Century Partnership," USINDO Luncheon, Fairmount, Washington D.C., November 14, 2008, available at: www.presidentri.go.id.

26. J. Grant, B. Bland, and G. Robinson, "South China Sea Issue Divides ASEAN," *The Financial Times*, July 16, 2012, available at: www.ft.com.

27. E. Fitriani, "Yudhoyono's Foreign Policy: Is Indonesia a Rising Power?," in: E. Aspinall, *et al.*, *The Yudhoyono Presidency: Indonesia's Decade of Stability and Stagnation*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015, pp. 73-90.

Indonesia's strategy on the South China Sea and Indo-Pacific as a whole. While Indonesia has been pushing for a binding ASEAN-China code of conduct that would solve problems in the South China Sea through negotiation, this policy is not new. It is a policy that was first developed back in the 1990s, and then signed by ASEAN and China as a Declaration of Conduct in November 2002.²⁸ To put it bluntly, dynamic equilibrium was, in essence, old wine in a new bottle. Rather than a new approach in dealing with the rise of China and growing tension in the Indo-Pacific region, it is a continuation of Indonesia's foreign policy dating back to the 1990s after the country first normalized its relationship with China. This continuity arises because of Indonesia's own institutional weaknesses, as will be discussed in the next section.

28. E. Laksmana, "Drifting towards Dynamic Equilibrium: Indonesia's South China Policy under Yudhoyono," in: U. Fionna, S. D. Negara, and D. Simandjuntak, *Aspirations with Limitations: Indonesia's Foreign Policy under Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2018, p. 163.

Domestic Influence on Indonesia's Asia-Pacific Strategy

One of the main reasons why the Yudhoyono administration pursued a multilateral institution-based strategy in order to face the challenge of the Indo-Pacific region is the lack of a national security strategy that would craft a united foreign policy goal for various Indonesian bureaucracies.

Indonesia's lack of coordination

The Indonesian bureaucracies are notorious for not working well together. Most of the ministers are appointed due to their affiliation to the ruling coalition, not due to their competence. As a result, they treat their ministries as their own fiefdoms, channeling state money for the benefit of their political parties and supporters.²⁹ Even Yudhoyono himself grumbled that more than 50 per cent of his instructions to his ministers were not followed at all,³⁰ and, a few months later, he further complained that his ministers were not responsive to problems in society.³¹ Not surprisingly, due to the resistance within the bureaucracy, it is very difficult for the Indonesian government to create a coherent national security strategy, let alone craft a specific Indo-Pacific policy.

However, the lack of a coherent approach to the Indo-Pacific problem is not solely due to bureaucratic resistance. Yudhoyono's penchant for personality diplomacy has also undermined the notion of a coherent national security strategy. He personally directed Indonesian foreign policy by crafting a parallel foreign affairs unit in the State Palace, known as the Presidential Staff for Foreign Affairs, backed by the president's imprimatur.³² This undermined the independence of the Foreign Ministry, leading to a perception of institutional and organizational incoherence in

29. M. Mietzner, "Soldiers, Parties and Bureaucrats: Illicit Fund-Raising in Contemporary Indonesia," *Southeast Asia Research*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2008, pp. 241-242.

30. "Ada Kelemahan Kepemimpinan [There's a weakness in leadership]," *Kompas*, July 13, 2011, available at: nasional.kompas.com.

31. "SBY Mengeluh Kabinetnya Belum Responsif [SBY complained that his cabinet wasn't responsive enough]," *Suara Pembaruan*, December 2, 2011, available at: sp.beritasatu.com.

32. A. L. Connelly, "Indonesian Foreign Policy Under President Jokowi," *Lowy Institute*, October 16, 2014, available at: www.lowyinstitute.org.

Indonesia's foreign policy. This, in turn, distracted Indonesia from focusing solely on ASEAN, and developing ASEAN centrality vis-à-vis problems in the region, as Yudhoyono, seeing himself as a global statesman, involved himself in various other issues, such as the Arab Spring.³³ Not surprisingly, many have noted a lack of principle or main goal in Indonesian foreign policy. In fact, questions have been raised as to what Indonesia's actual foreign policy goals are, especially with its unwillingness to face the hard choices. As Aaron Connelly noted:

SBY's [Yudhoyono's] foreign policy vision was often short on details, and like many of his domestic policies, avoided hard choices. (A vision of "a thousand friends and zero enemies" and an "all directions foreign policy" avoids hard choices by definition.) These policies were part of an approach to diplomacy that prioritised the promotion of Indonesia's profile overseas ahead of progress on thorny issues in world affairs.³⁴

The army's resistance

At the same time, there is also a problem about the mindset of the Indonesian military. For it, the idea of security is not simply a matter of military security in the traditional sense of fighting foreign threats. Rather, the biggest threat for Indonesia actually comes from inside the country. And that attitude still has a strong influence on Indonesia's current defense policy. The most recent Indonesian Department of Defense white paper, for instance, warned about harmful, foreign-influenced culture and ideas that would create havoc within the country, as part of a "proxy war," an indirect attack on the country through "systematic asymmetric warfare," cyberwarfare, and media propaganda intended to create conflicts based on "social, culture, primordialism, ethnicity, race, and religion." It stressed the need for the government to be aware of any attempt by foreign countries to split Indonesia, with "Arab Spring, political and security upheaval in Egypt, [and] civil wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria" as examples of how states wage proxy wars as a 21st century version of "divide and conquer."³⁵

As a result, despite the fact that Indonesia is an archipelagic state, it spends more money on its army than its navy and airforce combined. The

33. L. C. Sebastian, "Indonesia's Dynamic Equilibrium and ASEAN Centrality," in: *Prospects of Multilateral Cooperation in the Asia Pacific: To Overcome the Gap of Security Outlooks*, Tokyo: The National Institute for Defense Studies, 2014, p. 23.

34. A. L. Connelly, *Indonesian Foreign Policy under President Jokowi*, Sydney: Lowly Institute for International Policy, October 2014, pp. 3-4, available at: www.lowlyinstitute.org.

35. Ministry of Defense (Indonesia), *Buku putih pertahanan Indonesia 2015* [Indonesian Defense White Book], Jakarta, 2015, p. 11.

2019 proposed defense budget for instance, would allocate Rp. 40 trillion on the army, while spending just Rp. 17 trillion on the navy and Rp. 14 trillion on the airforce.³⁶ This means that Indonesia is simply unprepared to deal with threats beyond its border, especially against China, which spends vastly more on defense.

In addition to the unwillingness of the Indonesian military to focus on outside threats, it is also unwilling to join a military alliance with other states. Indonesia fears that, by allying with other states, it risks being dragged into conflicts that it does not want to get involved in, and that it would be dominated by the alliance's more powerful members, which would keep interfering and end up dominating the region.³⁷ To put it bluntly, if the Indo-Pacific concept ends up as an attempt by the United States and Japan to craft a defensive alliance, there is little chance that Indonesia would support it, due to the fear that this would open up the region to further US domination.

Exhibit A of this reluctance is the case of Indonesia trying to deal with the rise of piracy in the Strait of Malacca in the early 2000s. In March 2004, the media reported that the US had allegedly planned to deploy marines and special operation forces on high-speed vessels to combat piracy in the Malaccan Strait. Even though the US insisted that the media had misquoted congressional testimony by Admiral Thomas Fargo, the commander of the US Pacific Command, Indonesia reacted angrily to possible intervention by the United States. In fact, it saw that prospect as a far greater security threat than the piracy itself.³⁸ In response, Admiral Bernard Kent Sondakh, then Indonesian chief of the navy, proposed the idea of joint patrol between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore to prevent the US from intervening in the Malacca Strait.³⁹ The Malacca Straits Coordinated Patrol (Malsindo), later renamed Malacca Strait Patrols (MSP), was launched by Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia in July 2004.⁴⁰

36. M. O. Erwanti, "Kemhan ajukan Rp. 215T di 2019, Termasuk Untuk Penanganan Teroris [Ministry of Defense proposed Rp. 215 Trillion budget in 2019, including to combat terrorism], *Detik.com*, June 7, 2018, available at: news.detik.com.

37. F. B. Weinstein, *Indonesian Foreign Policy and the Dilemma of Dependence: From Sukarno to Suharto*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976, p. 184.

38. R. A. Supriyanto, "Naval Counter-Piracy in Indonesia," in: C. Liss and T. Biggs, *Piracy in Southeast Asia: Trends, Hot Spots and Responses*, London: Routledge, 2017, p. 99.

39. Anonymous, "Laksamana Dari Halmahera" [Admiral from Halmahera] *Majalah Detik*, January 29, 2015, available at: garudamiliter.blogspot.com. – Note: The official online archive for the magazine no longer exists. This is an unofficial mirror of the article.

40. J. Bradford, "U.S. counter-piracy efforts in Southeast Asia 2004-2015," in: C. Liss and T. Biggs, *Piracy in Southeast Asia: Trends, Hot Spots and Responses*, London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 38-39.

What is striking about MSP is that it is a coordinated effort by the three states to tackle the problem of piracy, instead of a joint effort that would entail much closer cooperation or even the creation of a joint-command structure, which would be far more effective. Furthermore, there were no strategic or policy underpinnings to make MSP really effective in dealing with pirates.⁴¹ Not surprisingly, bilateral coordination often just entailed “little more than exchanges of schedules, to which in many cases partners [do] not adhere.”⁴² In fact, it was not until 2006 that all three states finally agreed to ensure the right of hot pursuit up to five nautical miles into the territorial sea of neighboring states.⁴³ The main reason for all this is that the three states are still distrustful of each other, and zealous in protecting their sovereignty, fearing others’ interference in their internal affairs.⁴⁴ As to whether MSP is effective, while the number of incidents of piracy has dropped, the total number of maritime crimes has actually increased.⁴⁵ In addition, the drop in the number of incidents of piracy so coincided with the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which also saw the end of the Aceh civil war, which in turn allowed the Indonesian government to refocus on the threat of piracy.⁴⁶ By 2018, piracy and armed sea robberies had not yet been eradicated.⁴⁷

In short, it is difficult for Indonesia to even support a joint security effort by its close neighbors to secure a transportation network that is vital to Indonesia’s national interest, let alone join a security pact formed by the United States and its allies to challenge China and limit China’s ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region.

This also explains Indonesia’s negative reaction to India’s interest in joining MSP. When India, before Modi’s visit to Jakarta in 2018, expressed its interest in joining MSP, the response from Jakarta was that its quest was “not feasible” as “the littoral states are very cautious when dealing with patrol among themselves, let alone with a third state.” Jakarta also refused India’s request to have its navy join the patrol since this would “impinge on

41. J. N. Mak, “Unilateralism and Regionalism: Working Together Alone in the Malacca Straits,” in: G. G. Ong-Webb, *Piracy, Maritime Terrorism, and Securing the Malacca Strait*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2006, p. 156.

42. C. Vavro, “Piracy, Terrorism and the Balance of Power in the Malacca Strait,” *Canadian Naval Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Spring 2008, p. 14.

43. T. Davenport, “Legal Measures to Combat Piracy, Robbery,” in: C. Liss and T. Biggs, *Piracy in Southeast Asia: Trends, Hot Spots and Responses*, London: Routledge, 2017, p. 83.

44. R. A. Suprianto, *op. cit.*, 2017, p. 104, and S. L. C. Koh, “The Malacca Strait Patrols: Finding Common Ground,” *RSIS Commentary*, No. 091, April 20, 2016, available at: www.rsis.edu.sg.

45. J. N. Mak, “NGOs, Piracy and Maritime Crime in Southeast Asia,” *Asia Pacific Bulletin, East-West Center*, No. 228, September 4, 2013, available at: www.eastwestcenter.org.

46. J. Bradford, *op. cit.*, 2017, p. 40.

47. D. Fabbri, “Piracy and Armed Sea Robberies on the Rise in Asia, Singapore Straits,” *Channel News Asia*, January 16, 2018, available at: www.channelnewsasia.com.

the sovereignty of the littoral states.” It pointed out that even Indonesia’s own patrol had never ventured into Malaysian or Singaporean territorial waters. More importantly, from Jakarta’s perspective, the involvement of India would provide justification for China to press Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore to get more involved in the Malacca Strait Patrol, something that Indonesia would very much reject.⁴⁸ It is the fear of further involvement of both the United States and China in the region that proved to be the biggest security concern for Indonesians. Therefore, the Indonesian government has no other choice but to maintain the regional status quo to prevent an international crisis from interfering with its domestic affairs, and to keep engaging in talks and dialogue, leading a diplomat to observe that Indonesia “put more emphasis on symbolism than substance.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, Indonesia itself has benefited from the current status quo, in which there is no clear common enemy that the region faces. As Donald Emmerson rhetorically asked, “Why not prolong the happy combination of American ships for deterrence and Chinese markets for profit?”⁵⁰ Due to its importance in the region, the foreign policy goal of Indonesia has always been to create an equidistant balance between all the powers interested in the region in order to get as much benefit as possible, as those powers would have to court Indonesia due to its centrality in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific region as a whole.⁵¹ And, by making the centrality of ASEAN the key component in Indonesia’s Indo-Pacific strategy, Indonesia is able to craft a sort of unity among the members of ASEAN, acting as a barrier to prevent any form of regional grouping, such as an expansion of the Quad, to supplant, or at least to upend ASEAN,⁵² thus maintaining the status quo.

In the short term, this policy manages to maintain peace and prevent Indonesia from being dragged into conflict, which, admittedly, are the goals of Indonesia’s foreign policy. As a result, Indonesia keeps pushing the Indo-Pacific discussion toward cooperation, with ASEAN playing a central role in keeping the region peaceful. However, in the long term this poses the problem of possibly postponing the crisis, and thus causing much bigger problems down the road. That is the problem of Indonesia’s

48. D. Mitra, “Indonesia Told India Its Quest to Join Malacca Strait Patrols Isn’t Feasible,” *The Wire*, May 31, 2018, available at: thewire.in.

49. S. Jayakumar, *Diplomacy: A Singapore Experience*, Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2011, p. 242.

50. D. K. Emmerson, “Sunnyland or Rancho Mirage? ASEAN and the South China Sea,” *Yale Global*, February 23, 2016, available at: yaleglobal.yale.edu.

51. D. Novotny, *Torn Between America and China: Elite Perceptions and Indonesian Foreign Policy*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2010, pp. 304-305.

52. B. Garekar, “Quad Leaders Stress ASEAN’s Centrality in their Indo-Pacific Vision,” *The Strait Times*, November 17 2018, available at: www.straitstimes.com.

multilateral approach, namely: What if there were a state that simply refused to agree? In this case, China would keep acting as a spoiler through its economic and military influence. In fact, Indonesia was concerned that a growing China threat would cause more instability in the region, and it would have to create a coherent national security strategy to deal with this. Yet, in order to deal with the instability, Indonesia would have to reorient its defense policy and the priorities of its ministries, and it would cost the president a lot of political capital to challenge special interests in the military and the bureaucracy, including the political parties that are part of the governing coalition – political capital that the president is unwilling to incur.

Therefore, due to domestic political considerations and the unwillingness of the Indonesian military to reorient itself from focusing on internal threats to reforming itself in order to focus on external threats, Indonesia's multilateral institutional strategy toward the Indo-Pacific is a default position. Other options would be politically expensive and difficult to achieve. This consideration weighs on the Jokowi administration in its pursuit of the Global Maritime Fulcrum strategy, and Indonesia's Indo-Pacific strategy as a whole.

Indonesia's Indo-Pacific Policy under President Joko Widodo

When President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo was inaugurated in 2014, he stressed his commitment to a “free and active foreign policy” and, in the same sentence, he added “that serves the national interest.”⁵³ It was a promise for a foreign policy approach that would be different from that of his predecessor.

Jokowi's domestic policy priority

Unlike Yudhoyono, Jokowi was simply not interested in foreign policy, seeing himself more as a domestic reformer focusing on economic development than as an international statesman. While Yudhoyono was stressing a “thousand friends, zero enemies,” Jokowi asked: “What's the point of having many friends but we only get the disadvantages? Many friends should bring many benefits.”⁵⁴ Whereas Yudhoyono was a globalist-multilateralist, relishing the opportunity for Indonesia – and himself – to take a central stage in the international spotlight through involvement in various international organizations and causes, Jokowi is more of a nationalist-unilateralist, only doing things that may benefit Indonesia. Whereas Yudhoyono loves international accomplishment and was rumored to have the ambition of being the next Secretary General of the United Nations,⁵⁵ Jokowi is well known for his reluctance to attend international events. Even before he was inaugurated, while he expressed his readiness to go to Myanmar to attend the ASEAN summit, he was hesitant to attend the G-20 Leaders Summit in Brisbane, Australia,⁵⁶ which Yudhoyono would have attended with gusto. Jokowi's disinterest is influenced less by

53. N. Lumanauw, “Jokowi Tegaskan Politik Luar Negeri Bebas Aktif RI [Jokowi Emphasized Indonesia's Free and Active Foreign Policy],” *Beritasatu*, October 20, 2014, available at: www.beritasatu.com.

54. R. Wardhy, “Jokowi Signals Break With ‘Thousand Friends’ Foreign Policy,” *The Jakarta Globe*, November 17, 2014, available at: jakartaglobe.id.

55. “Indonesian President Yudhoyono offered leading position at United Nations: Report,” *The Strait Times*, September 2, 2014, available at: www.straitstimes.com.

56. B. T. Saragih, “Jokowi to Attend ASEAN Summit, May Skip G-20 Meet,” *The Jakarta Post*, October 8, 2014, available at: www.thejakartapost.com.

his lack of foreign policy experience than by his belief, which is shared by Rizal Sukma, his main foreign policy advisor, that ASEAN and other multilateral groupings are unable to provide substantive outcomes and benefits for Indonesia.⁵⁷ His selection of Retno Marsudi as his foreign minister reflected Jokowi's belief. In her last posting in the Netherlands, career diplomat Retno Marsudi was instrumental in boosting trade between Indonesia and the Netherlands. In essence, Jokowi is interested less in a minister who is capable of crafting a grand strategy than in one who will promote trade.⁵⁸

Jokowi's Global Maritime Fulcrum

Jokowi's focus on the economy, in turn, is also reflected in the implementation of the concept of the Global Maritime Fulcrum. It was supposedly the blueprint of Jokowi's foreign policy, and his Indo-Pacific strategy, which would demonstrate the "free and active foreign policy" guided by the national interest. This concept was mentioned twice by Jokowi during the presidential election debates with Prabowo Subianto, his opponent, and a couple of times in the aftermath. The concept aimed to revive "Indonesia's archipelagic state identity" and "maritime spirit," and to return Indonesia back to its glorious heydays as a "great nation," while hewing close to the idea of a "free and active foreign policy."⁵⁹ The problem is that nobody really knows quite what Jokowi meant by his vision of Indonesia as "the Maritime Fulcrum," even more than four years into his presidency. Unlike Yudhoyono, foreign policy seems to be an afterthought for Jokowi. He devotes most of his energy and political capital to dealing with domestic issues, especially economic development. And thus the concept of the Global Maritime Fulcrum, even though it is supposed to have both economic and geostrategic elements, ends up focusing too much on the economic side, notably the development of Indonesia's maritime infrastructure. Indeed, Jokowi only focuses on foreign affairs if he believes that it could help him achieve his economic goals.⁶⁰

The same problem that plagued the Yudhoyono administration – the lack of cooperation and policy focus among ministers – also plagued the

57. A. Poole, "Is Jokowi Turning His Back on ASEAN?," *Indonesia at Melbourne*, September 1, 2015, available at: indonesiatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au.

58. D. Besant, "The Quiet Achiever: Retno Marsudi," *Southeast Asia Globe*, December 4, 2014, available at: sea-globe.com.

59. E. Laksmana, "Indonesia's New President Can Deepen Cooperation with Europe and the United States," *The German Marshall Fund of The United States Blog*, August 15, 2014, available at: blog.gmfus.org.

60. Sheany, "Indonesia to Boost Efforts in Economic Diplomacy," *The Jakarta Globe*, February 12, 2018, available at: jakartaglobe.id.

Jokowi administration. Even though the Widodo administration proposed the concept of the Global Maritime Fulcrum and published the *Presidential Regulation* [Perpres] 16/2017 on Indonesian Sea Policy that put forth the Sea Policy Action Plan to “facilitate the acceleration” of the vision of the Global Maritime Fulcrum,⁶¹ in reality the policy was “effectively a ‘bureaucratic umbrella’ document” connecting pre-existing policies and programs, and was skewed toward domestic policies,⁶² rather than a new approach, or a new vision for Indonesia’s foreign policy, let alone an Indo-Pacific strategy. In essence, it ends up maintaining the status quo in the cabinet that would not intervene with the ongoing plans of the various ministries involved.

Not surprisingly, in the end, no breakthrough Indo-Pacific strategy has emerged from the Global Maritime Fulcrum. It is very similar to Marty Natalegawa’s Indo-Pacific concepts, as mentioned above, and neither adds anything new, nor involves any actual application of the Global Maritime Fulcrum concept to the Indo-Pacific strategy.

This was demonstrated in how Jokowi handled his foreign policy crisis, the incursion of Chinese fishing boats in the seas around the Natuna Islands, which are claimed by Indonesia. In response to the latest incursion, on June 23, 2016, Jokowi convened a limited cabinet meeting on board a navy corvette in the Natuna seas, and ordered the Indonesian navy to step up patrols and to improve the capabilities of the Indonesian military.⁶³ There were several problems with this gesture. First, it was not a new policy. Even during the Yudhoyono administration, General Moeldoko, Yudhoyono’s Chief of the Military, had already stated his desire to strengthen the defenses in Natuna due to problems in the South China Seas.⁶⁴ Second, when push came to shove, it was difficult to see how Indonesia could prevail due to the massive difference in military expenditure between Indonesia and China (US\$8 billion versus US\$228 billion respectively in 2017).⁶⁵

Third, and most importantly, with Jokowi’s strong focus on economic growth there was simply no stomach in Jakarta for conflict with China. He was desperate for economic investment, especially from China.

61. *Presidential Regulation* [Perpres] 16/2017, Jakarta, 2017, available at: sipuu.setkab.go.id.

62. E. Laksmana, “Indonesian Sea Policy: Accelerating Jokowi’s Global Maritime Fulcrum?,” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, March 23, 2017, available at: amti.csis.org.

63. K. Kapoor and F. Jensen, “Indonesia President Visits Islands on Warship, Makes Point to China,” *Reuters*, June 23, 2016, available at: www.reuters.com.

64. I. Wijaya, “Pulang dari Cina, Panglima Moeldoko Ingin Perkuat Natuna [Returning from China, Indonesian Military Chief Moeldoko Wanted to Strengthen Natuna],” *Tempo*, March 4, 2014, available at: nasional.tempo.co.

65. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, available at: www.sipri.org.

Not surprisingly, despite the tensions in the South China Sea, by May 2017 Jokowi had already met with Chinese President Xi Jinping six times, including five times in Beijing.⁶⁶

Thus, despite Jokowi's declaration on the Global Maritime Fulcrum as the new Indonesian vision, in the end he was relying on the old playbook of Marty Natalegawa. This is evident in Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi's January 2018 announcement that Indonesia was trying to build "an ecosystem of peace, stability, and prosperity" in the Indo-Pacific region and to advance "strong positive cooperation in Indo-Pacific" instead of "a cooperation that is based on suspicion or worse, a perception of threat."⁶⁷ A few months later, Jokowi, in the 32nd ASEAN Summit, further reiterated the "calls for cooperation among all countries with Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean coasts," with ASEAN playing a role "in developing the framework of Indo-Pacific cooperation."⁶⁸ Despite all the rhetoric, given the lack of an alternative, at the end of the day the Jokowi administration is continuing the strategy set by Marty Natalegawa.

66. I. Parlina, "Jokowi Has Fifth Meeting with China's Xi," *The Jakarta Post*, September 3, 2016, available at: www.thejakartapost.com, and H. Purwanto, "President Jokowi Concludes Work Visit in Beijing," *Antaraneews.com*, May 15, 2017, available at: en.antaraneews.com.

67. "2018 Annual Press Statement of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia H. E. Retno L. P. Marsudi," *Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia*, Jakarta, January 9, 2008, available at: www.kemlu.go.id, p. 13.

68. M. A. Sapiie, "Indonesia Wants ASEAN to Take Central Role in Developing Indo-Pacific Cooperation," *The Jakarta Post*, April 29, 2018, available at: www.thejakartapost.com.

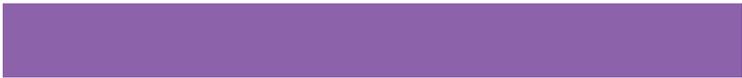
Conclusion

So what is Indonesia's Indo-Pacific strategy? In essence, there is not really a coherent national Indo-Pacific strategy. Rather, Indonesia's sole goal is to prevent itself from being dragged into conflict that would threaten its bargaining power. Thus its only choice is to take a multilateral institutional approach that it hopes will lower tensions in the region and maintain the status quo both in the region and domestically.

As a result, Indonesia fiercely guards its independence, unwilling to depend on or to be over-influenced by the interested powers: India, Japan, China, the United States, and Australia. It sees itself as the honest broker, the key balancer in the region, whereby everyone needs Indonesia but, at the same time, Indonesia also needs everyone to fulfill its foreign policy goals of regional stability. And to prevent itself from being put in an uncomfortable position, it relies on the centrality of ASEAN, in which, as one of its key players, it can exert a lot of influence.

Therefore, despite all the excitement about the concept of President Joko Widodo's Global Maritime Fulcrum adding something new to Indonesia's foreign policy, in the end the country's foreign policy does not deviate much from its basic principles of *resilience*, *non-intervention*, and a *free and active foreign policy*, which by design has an inward-looking orientation, and focuses only on short-term or immediate foreign policy goals and accomplishments, notably maintaining current peace. In the long run, these three principles severely limit the foreign policy options that Indonesia could take.

The upshot is that Indonesia's Indo-Pacific policy lacks anything concrete beyond more economic and social-cultural cooperation. In the case of growing tension in the Indo-Pacific region, there is simply no possibility that Indonesia will join any military pact or work with others to contain China or other countries militarily. Rather, for Indonesia, the solution for any such tension is more cooperation and more diplomacy to achieve a consensus that hopefully could be used as a blueprint for crafting steps for further confidence-building.



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