

Indonesia Grapples with the Indo-Pacific: Outreach, Strategic Discourse, and Diplomacy

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Abstract

This article analyses and evaluates Indonesia's grappling with the Indo-Pacific. Analysis is threefold – Indonesia's actorness in the Indo-Pacific, its strategic discourse on the Indo-Pacific, and its Indo-Pacific diplomacy. Actorness is pursued with regard to Indonesia's more active involvement in regional and subregional structures in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean. Strategic discourse is threefold – Natalegawa's "Indo-Pacific Treaty" concept (2013–2014), Widodo's "maritime nexus" drive (2014 onwards), and the current "Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept" (IPCC; 2018 onwards). Diplomacy is pursued with regard to Indonesia's relationship with Australia, Japan, China, India, and the United States. The article concludes that while Indonesia certainly is on the rise as an Indo-Pacific actor, its continuing naval weakness undermines Indonesia's "maritime nexus" stance, while its reluctance to challenge China leaves Indonesia's Indo-Pacific Treaty and its IPCC vague and to some degree ignoring uncomfortable security issues posed by China. A closer synergy for Indonesia with the US and Japanese Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative is suggested.

Keywords

Indonesia, Indo-Pacific, South China Sea, geopolitics, geoeconomics, maritime

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Introduction

During the twentieth century, traditionally Indonesia followed an inward-looking “archipelagic outlook” (*wawasan nusantara*) focussing on maintaining control of its far-flung islands and waters. Where Indonesia looked further, it looked outwards to its land neighbours in Southeast Asia and its regional organisation the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), where it was the natural leader on account of size and population. What has become apparent this century is that Indonesia has gone beyond this rather localised positioning and is now currently positioning itself within a wider Indo-Pacific (*Indo-Pasifik*) frame of reference for its foreign policy.

This current Indo-Pacific turn was implicitly indicated through Indonesia actively reaching out to greater involvement in various subregional frameworks in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Oceans from 2001 onwards – the first section of this article. This has been followed since 2013 by explicit “Indo-Pacific” formulations in the shape of the call for an Indo-Pacific Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation (IPTFC), the identification of Indonesia as a *maritime nexus* bridging the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and most recently the pushing of the Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept (IPCC) – the second section of this article. Indonesia’s sense of the Indo-Pacific has consequently become entwined in its diplomacy with Australia, India, Japan, China, and the United States, including Indonesia responding to their particular Indo-Pacific formulations and policies – the third section of this article

This article is primarily an empirical piece of foreign policy analysis, which seeks to analyse, explain, and evaluate this adoption of the “Indo-Pacific” by Indonesia. It argues that while:

1. Indonesia has been successful in extending its presence in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans;
2. Indonesia has been much less successful in establishing itself as a maritime power;
3. Indonesia’s call for an IPTFC has been largely ignored by the region;
4. Indonesia’s IPCC remains still subject to slow-moving internal ASEAN discussions and questions over whether the concept perhaps avoids the uncomfortable security challenges posed by China.

In terms of theory, the article argues that in analysing Indonesia’s Indo-Pacific turn, theories of traditional regionalism which looks at institute-building and traditional geopolitics which looks at a state’s *place* in terms of location in a region can be fruitfully complemented by theories of “critical regionalism” (including “cognitive regionalism”) which looks at regions as subjective constructs, and “critical geopolitics” which looks at a state’s *place* in terms of its aspirations, hopes, and fears in an envisaged region.

This Indonesian embrace of the Indo-Pacific reflects three broad imperatives. Firstly, energy security; “to achieve energy security at home, Indonesia needs to actively administer the safety of the sea lanes along the Indo-Pacific” (Randy, 2014). Secondly, China not only uncomfortably bears down on Indonesia in the South China Sea but also

increasingly operates on Indonesia's flanks in the south-west Pacific and Indian Ocean. This simple geopolitical fact is why Indonesia is unable to maintain its previous inward-looking archipelagic self-absorption. Thirdly, there is growing unease in Indonesia about rising Great Power competition between China and the United States that threatens to marginalise ASEAN and Indonesia. Indonesia's Indo-Pacific strategy is an attempt to come to terms with these developments.

To track Indonesia grappling with the Indo-Pacific, close attention is paid to Indonesian rhetoric *in and around* government concerning strategy together with specific policy and actions of an Indo-Pacific character. The article is organised into three sections; namely Indonesia's (1) outreach to the Pacific and Indian Oceans, (2) Indo-Pacific strategic discourse, and (3) Indo-Pacific diplomacy.

Outreach to the Pacific and Indian Oceans

Geographically, Indonesia is a quintessential Indo-Pacific power, facing the Indian Ocean on the west, the South China Sea on the north, and the Pacific Ocean on the east. Indonesia's position reflects what Indonesians call their own "cross-road location" (*posisi silang*). Geographically, Indonesia acts as a "strategic funnel" (*corong strategis*) between the Indo and Pacific components of the Indo-Pacific, in which "today's regional geopolitics, characterized by the rise of maritime powers in Asia and beyond, has increasingly made our sea-lanes and maritime choke-points (the Malacca, Sunda, Lombok and Makassar straits) critical," and "therefore consequential to our foreign-policy strategic planners" (Manggala, 2015). Hence, one Indonesian commentator's argument that "linking these two oceans augments Indonesia's geostrategic role" (Suryodiningrat, 2014) – traditional geopolitics merging into critical geopolitics as location generates aspirations.

From the 1950s to the 1990s, Indonesia's focus remained internally set on maintaining archipelagic cohesion and regionally focused on the ASEAN. However, in the current century, Indonesia has actively reached out simultaneously into the Pacific and Indian Oceans, in effect out to the Indo-Pacific.

With regard to the Pacific, the previous President Susilo Yudhoyono argued that "Indonesia is well positioned to serve as the Pacific's gateway to Asia" (Yudhoyono, 2006; also Suryodipuro, 2014). Classical regionalism and critical regionalism converge, as Indonesia has been much more active since 2001 with regard to smaller subregional initiatives, where it is not overshadowed by the larger powers like the United States and China. This Indonesian subregional activism has been evident with regard to the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI), the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), the Southwest Pacific Dialogue (SWPD), the Pacific Islands Forum, and the Pacific Island Development Forum.

Indonesia set up the CTI in 2009 with Malaysia, the Philippines, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands to deal with coral reefs, fisheries, and food security. A Secretariat was established in Jakarta in 2015. The initiative was described as "a new geography for a new age" (Foad, 2013) and a channel for "Indonesian leadership" (White and Halim, 2014). Government officials were clear on the formula

that it was designed “to safeguard the rich marine resources of the Indo-Pacific region” (Suryodipuro, 2011).

Indonesia’s control of West Papua has been a running issue between Indonesia and the neighbouring MSG, which brings together Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, as well as the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front of New Caledonia. A “Melanesian foray” has been evident in recent years, reflecting domestic politics, with Indonesia “seeking Pacific status to legitimise its stranglehold on West Papua” whereby “Indonesian diplomacy has vigorously extended itself east into Melanesia in an attempt to maintain control over West Papua, its territorial bridge to the Pacific” (Webb-Gannon and Elmslie, 2014; also Lawson, 2016; Zahidi, 2018). Indonesia has enjoyed Observer status with the MSG since 2011, and through its five Melanesian provinces in West Papua was given “Associate Membership” status in 2015. Government rhetoric was fulsome, “the Pacific Region is one of the top priorities for Indonesia”, that “our concept of maritime fulcrum emphasizes ‘connectivity’ as one of its pillars” and that “through Indonesia’s membership in the MSG, the connectivity between the people of the MSG Members and 11 million Melanesian Indonesians will be enhanced” (Fachir, 2015; also Carnadi, 2015; Hernawan, 2015).

Indonesia’s subregional “leverage” (Santarita, 2002) has been further channelled through the SWPD an Indonesian initiative set up in 2002. At the Foreign Minister level, this brings Indonesia together with Australia, East Timor, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea. It enables “the government to give more serious attention to the Pacific, not just to minimize international support for the Papuan rebels but also to boost economic cooperation between Indonesia’s eastern provinces and the Pacific countries” (Purba, 2002).

Indonesia has pushed still deeper into the Pacific basin. Emphasising its wider Austronesian links and common “island” (*nesia*) status with Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, Indonesia obtained formal Dialogue status with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in 2001, Observer status with the Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF) set up in 2013, and sent a delegation to the newly reformed Austronesian Forum in 2018. Yudhoyono was invited to give the keynote address at the PIDF Summit in June 2014 in which he made the geopolitical point that “as Indonesia is both a Pacific Ocean country and an Indian Ocean country, it is in the best interest of Indonesia to bridge the Pacific region with the Indian Ocean” (Yudhoyono, 2014).

With regard to the Indian Ocean, its importance has been rediscovered by the Indonesian government. This was reflected in the comment by the then Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Minister Fadel Muhammad in 2011 that “the government believes that the Atlantic Ocean is the past, the Pacific Ocean is today, and the Indian Ocean is the future” (Adamrah, 2011). In turn, Jokowi’s “Look West” stance is generating more Indonesian involvement in the Indian Ocean (Santikajaya, 2014; Sebastian and Syailendra, 2014; Suryodiningrat, 2015). One commentator reckoned that “the objectives of Widodo’s foreign policy platform reflect Indonesia’s attempts to balance an ascendant China through strengthening cooperation in the Indian Ocean theatre” (Nabbs-Keller, 2014: 22). Indonesia’s Indian Ocean outreach has been shaped through the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS).

Indonesia was a founder member of the IORA set up in 1997, but initially took a low profile within a low key organisation, if one uses classical regionalism modelling. However, Indonesia has sought to use the IORA to project its own message and indeed aspirations, reflecting critical regionalism. Indonesia's turn to chair IORA from 2015–2017 was greeted by Foreign Ministry officials as an opportunity to apply Widodo's concept of a maritime nexus, "with that chairmanship, Indonesia must take a role to bolster the mutual reinforcement of diplomacy and maritime fulcrum" (Djumala, 2015; also Saragih, 2015; Setiyanto, 2017). Indonesia's chairing of IORA saw the first ever Leaders Summit in 2017, complete with signing of the *Jakarta Concord*.

As successive IORA chairs (India 2011–2013, Australia 2013–2015, Indonesia 2015–2017), the three had already formed a steering Troika for the IORA. Spinning off that that IORA format, the three countries held their own first Senior Officials trilateral dialogue in November 2017 in Indonesia. Its focus was "to discuss a shared vision for an open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region" which "included promoting and protecting the rules-based order in the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia and across the Indo-Pacific" (IAI, 2017). This format was repeated in September 2018, participants agreeing that it "consolidated the relationship between our countries as three major democracies and maritime powers of the Indo-Pacific" (IAI, 2018). This points to Indonesia's Indo-Pacific diplomacy being hammered out with other actors like India and Australia

Indonesia is also a member of the IONS set up in 2008. As part of the IONS events for 2010–2012, the Indonesian Navy hosted an Anti-Piracy and Preparatory Workshop from 18 to 19 October 2011 at Jakarta. Djalal's presentation there was stark, since Indonesia "controls several important sea lanes for the communications between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean and between the mainland Asia and Australia" but that "Indonesia requires an enormous amount of law enforcement as well as defense capabilities at sea. It has been estimated that it requires more than 370 vessels [. . .] Yet, so far, it has only about 115 vessels" (Djalal, 2011; also Hudaya and Putra, 2017). This question of naval assets points to President's Widodo's *maritime fulcrum* concept, part of the official strategic discourse that has focused onto the Indo-Pacific since 2013.

As will be seen, Indonesia has actively used the East Asia Summit (EAS), a relatively weak de facto Indo-Pacific regional body set up in 2005 that includes the United States, Japan, China, Australia, and India, to put forward its own Indo-Pacific formulations concerning the IPTFC, Indonesia as a *maritime fulcrum*, and the IPCC. This brings us to Indonesia's official Indo-Pacific strategic formulations.

Indo-Pacific Strategic Formulations

Concepts generate aspirations, "with the Indo-Pacific concept, Indonesia can expand its interests in the Pacific and Indian Oceans" (Antara, 2018b). Critical regionalism and critical geopolitics both recognise the role that such types of constructs ("geographical imaginations") play in shaping regional/security architectures. Inside government, Indonesian formulations have moved from Natalegawa's IPTFC proposal made in 2013, to Widodo's "maritime fulcrum" announced in 2014 and then his government's IPCC pushed during 2018.

Indo-Pacific Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation

Marty Natalegawa, the then Foreign Minister, introduced the Indo-Pacific into Indonesia's official foreign policy discourse in May 2013, when he noted that "the term 'Indo-Pacific' has become increasingly common in the lexicon of geopolitics" (2013a; also Sukma, 2013; H. Djalal, 2014; Ram, 2015). Natalegawa stressed that "the term Indo-Pacific brings into focus the reality of the interconnection between the futures of the Indian and Pacific Oceans" (Natalegawa, 2013a). He went on to define the region "in terms of geography" whereby the term Indo-Pacific "refers to an important triangular spanning two oceans, the Pacific and Indian Oceans, bounded by Japan in the north, Australia in the southeast, and India in the south-west, notably with Indonesia at its center" (Natalegawa, 2013a). The first part of the sentence brought out the two oceans, whereas the second part of the sentence pointed geographically to a core Indo-Pacific of the Western Pacific Ocean and Eastern Indian Ocean and geopolitically pointed to an Indo-Pacific political triangle with Indonesia at the centre and India, Australia, and Japan at the perimeter points.

Within Natalegawa's speech, Indonesia's location included transit centrality, as "amidst its archipelagic waters are found some of the most strategic sea lanes in the world: connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans" (Natalegawa, 2013a; also Primanita, 2015). Geographical location generated geopolitical aspirations, geopolitics to critical geopolitics, "for Indonesia, given its geography, the future course of the Indo-Pacific region is in our profound interest" (Natalegawa, 2013a). Given an American presence as a resident/sovereign power at Guam in the Western Pacific, Natalegawa correctly designated an "Indo-Pacific region, which enfolds both the United States and Indonesia" (Natalegawa, 2013a).

The significance of Natalegawa's perception of an Indo-Pacific region that Indonesia was located in was that such a perception generated policy-pushing to bring about a "transformation of the Indo-Pacific region" (Natalegawa, 2013a). The mechanism was "a fresh perspective for the Indo-Pacific region" (Natalegawa, 2013a) in which "we should be ready to work towards an Indo-Pacific wide treaty of friendship and cooperation" (Natalegawa, 2013a). Such an *IPATFC* would involve "a commitment by states in the region to build confidence, to solve disputes by peaceful means and to promote a concept of security that is all encompassing; underscoring that security is a common good" (2013a).

In front of an Australian audience in July 2013, Natalegawa (2013b) again presented this Indo-Pacific Treaty proposal as "a fresh paradigm [...] addressing geopolitical shifts and change." As when introducing the treaty idea in May 2013, Natalegawa (2013b) again indicated that such an "Indo-Pacific wide treaty of friendship" would be "a commitment by states in the region to build confidence, to solve disputes by peaceful means, and to promote common security." In a comparative vein, Natalegawa (2013) argued that such an Indo-Pacific Treaty would be "a treaty, not unlike the [existing] Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia" and would strengthen "the commitment already expressed by the East Asia Summit participating countries through the so-called 'Bali Principles' on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations" agreed at

the EAS in 2011. Natalegawa took to the Indonesian media in August 2013, where he argued “it is timely now to think of some kind of a binding treaty involving the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean”; a treaty which “can be an instrument that countries can join over time, and doesn’t have to be done all at one go. But you can have it out there for countries to gradually accept” (Khalik and Aswim, 2013). President Yudhoyono formally tabled the Treaty concept at the 2013 EAS Summit in November, but with no take up from other states, and no institutional EAS structures to take it forward.

Maritime Fulcrum

Whereas Yudhoyono and his Foreign Minister Natalegawa stressed the regional diplomatic nature of possible Indo-Pacific links, the Widodo administration that came into power in July 2014 initially emphasised the Indo-Pacific in a much more maritime-naval setting, with a “message about Indonesia’s rightful aspirations as a seagoing Indo-Pacific power – that is, an archipelagic country connecting two oceans” (Bandoro, 2014; also Santikajaya, 2014). Bandoro’s talk of “rightful aspirations” on sea power reflects a *critical geopolitics* based on traditional geopolitics “connecting” location. Widodo represented a “reset” in Indonesian foreign policy, “the emergence of the Indo-Pacific region as its geopolitical canvas” (Shehkar, 2018: 16).

In Widodo’s election manifesto, Indonesia was repeatedly described in maritime-related phrases, including “maritime state” (*negara maritime*), a “maritime Indonesia” (*maritim Indonesia*) with a “maritime economy” (*ekonomi maritim*), practicing “maritime diplomacy” (*diplomasi maritim*), seeking “maritime security” (*keamanan maritim*) through “maritime power” (*kekuatan maritim*). This maritime focus was partly with regard to the well-established language about Indonesia being an “archipelagic state” (*negara kepulauan*), but went beyond it to “expand the theatre of diplomatic involvement in the Indo-Pacific region”, and “focus to the Indo-Pacific region, integrating the two oceans – the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean,” with “strategic environment and foreign policy implementation in the Indo-Pacific” (Widodo and Jusuf, 2014: 12).

In office, Widodo has stressed an Indo-Pacific maritime focus through his “maritime fulcrum” (*poros maritima*) concept (Jakarta Post, 2017; Sambhi, 2015; Santoso and Fadhillah, 2017; Situmorang, 2015; Supangat and Muhamad, 2014). His inauguration speech in October 2014 included a call “to turn Indonesia into a maritime nation once again. Oceans, seas, straits and bays are the future of our civilization. We’ve turned our back on the seas, oceans, straits and bays for far too long” (Widodo, 2014a). In a deliberate turn of phrase, Widodo then used the Indonesian naval motto when declaring “it is time for us to realize *jalesveva jayamahe*, ‘in the ocean we triumph’” (2014a), a motto also used by his Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs Indroyono Soesilo (2015).

Widodo’s maritime fulcrum partly emphasised Indonesia’s through transit position, traditional geopolitics. Various maritime projects were envisaged to create a “sea highway” (*tol laut*) within Indonesia. Widodo’s new Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs, Indroyono Soesilo (2014) announced a key west-east “maritime highway” (*jalan*

raya maritim) project in November 2014; which envisages expanding five major ports in north Sumatra (Belawan), and, Jakarta (Tanjung Priok), East Java (Tanjung Perak), south Sulawesi (Makassar) and Papua (Sorong) as well as twenty others. These generated the need for infrastructure development.

However, the “maritime fulcrum” had wider Indo-Pacific horizons. This was on show a month after his inauguration, at the EAS in November 2014, where Widodo stressed and elaborated on what his “maritime fulcrum” concept involved. Such a “maritime fulcrum” involved policies whereby “Indonesia is certainly interested to participate in determining the future of the Pacific and Indian Ocean region (PACINDO)” (Widodo, 2014b; also Witular, 2014). Widodo emphasised Indonesia’s pivotal maritime position both in location and policy terms “as a country that is the bridge between two oceans, Indonesia is obligated to build its maritime defense power” (Widodo, 2014b), traditional geopolitics tenets of a state’s position as “location” leading to Mahanian concepts of *seapower* and critical geopolitics’ sense of location leading to aspirations.

A fivefold maritime application was proposed by Widodo at the EAS, namely (1) developing a *maritime culture*, (2) improving management of Indonesia’s oceans and fisheries so as to strengthen maritime “food sovereignty,” (3) boosting Indonesia’s *maritime economy* by improving the country’s port infrastructure and shipping industry, (4) bolstering Indonesia’s *maritime defenses* so as to achieve maritime sovereignty and maritime security, and (5) increasing *maritime diplomacy* with other maritime powers. Issues two to four reflect Indonesia’s central location within the Indo-Pacific, the focus of traditional geopolitics, and Indonesia’s transit role between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, while issue five reflects relationships with other Indo-Pacific powers. Issue one, *maritime culture*, reflects critical geopolitics’ construction of outlooks for an envisaged maritime region. The significance of this public declaration was clear, “Jokowi [Widodo] has positioned Indonesia as an Indo-Pacific power” (Piesse, 2015: 1; also Agastia and Perwita, 2015; Aufiya, 2017). This “maritime fulcrum” involves Indonesia’s geopolitical role as both a “gateway” and a “gatekeeper” of the increasingly interconnected Indian and Pacific oceans (Gindarsah, 2016), including “the security of Sea Lanes of Communications in the Indo-Pacific” (Agastia and Perwita, 2016).

At the Foreign Ministry, Retno Marsudi’s Annual Press Statement in January 2015 announced that “Indonesia’s diplomacy will show its character as a maritime nation and will put take advantage of its strategic position between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans” (Marsudi, 2015). Officials argued in February 2015 that the implications of Widodo’s “maritime fulcrum” concept were that “Indonesia should not only act as the center of maritime dynamics and economic activity between two continents and two oceans but should also take great responsibility,” a critical geopolitics undertone, whereby “if Indonesia wants to be a center of maritime activity in the region, then we should guarantee that our territorial and adjacent waters are safe” (Djumala, 2015). Indeed, some officials were blunt, “the maritime axis [fulcrum] is about lifting archipelagic Indonesia onto the world stage by becoming a military maritime power [...] Being a strong military maritime power is necessary” (Supangat and Muhamad, 2014: 7). Defence Minister Ryamizard Ryachud’s preface to the 2015 *Defense White Paper* was that “Indonesia, located between two oceans and two continents has a unique

geographical position. This requires Indonesia to strategize its position carefully [. . .] in order to support the Indonesia's interests as the global maritime fulcrum" (Ryachudu, 2015: v-vi; also T Marsetio, 2014; M Marsetio, 2017). The *Ocean Policy* released on 1 March 2017 was designed to "facilitate the acceleration" (Laksmana, 2017b; also Muhibat, 2018) of Widodo's maritime fulcrum doctrine. It painted a picture of domestic and external maritime security and development for Indonesia but was aspirational rather than tangible.

In reality, Widodo inherited a decaying 213-ship navy, with only 11 major surface combatants, mostly Cold War commissions, of which fewer than half were seaworthy. Its biggest components were six Ahmad Yani class frigates that were in fact old extended 1960's Van Speikk-class frigates, with two new Sigma class frigates under construction in the Netherlands. Under the 2005 *Green-Water Navy* modernisation blueprint, Indonesia had been aiming for a 274-ship force by 2024 (made up of 110 surface combatants, 66 patrol vessels, and 98 support ships) to be achieved through construction and purchasing. Some naval modernisation is taking place, but both construction and purchasing have lagged, with economic slowdown reducing hopes of significantly greater defence spending, which has only nudged up from Rp102.3 trillion (around US\$7.9 billion) in 2015 to Rp107.7 trillion (around US\$10 billion) in 2018. As Hasjim Djalal noted, there is no quick fix for Indonesia's naval strength with such economic constrictions and relatively modest spending; "if Indonesia does decide to become a real 'maritime power' as it should, history has indicated that it would take at least 15 to 20 years to realize that aspiration" (Djalal, 2016: 3), if not longer. Moreover, Indonesia's current "green-water" naval aims are concerned with internal defence of the Indonesian archipelago and not with blue water power projection out into the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and wider SLOC security there.

Three years on from Widodo's first enunciation of the maritime nexus policy, the policy seemed to be faltering and inward-looking, with Indonesian commentators asking in the wider "Indo-Pacific strategic flux, where is Indonesia" (Laksmana, 2017a) – the flux being increasing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and subsequent Great Power competition and confrontation across the Indo-Pacific. These developments spurred a shift in Indonesian Indo-Pacific approaches during 2018.

Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept

A shift in Indonesian discussions was apparent as Indonesia spent 2018 developing what it calls the IPCC; "an Indo-Pacific construct with 'Indonesian characteristics'" (Laksmana, 2018a). In many ways, the IPCC resumes the external focus seen in Natalegawa's earlier 2013 call for an IPTFC (Natalegawa, 2018).

Indonesia's Foreign Secretary Marsudi announced this new Indo-Pacific push in her Annual Press Statement made on 9 January 2018, which one Indonesian commentator saw as "Indonesia takes ownership of Indo-Pacific geopolitics" (Bayuni, 2018). Invoking traditional and critical regionalism/geopolitics, Marsudi announced that "in the midst of regional geopolitical changes, Indonesia, located at the crossroads of the Indian and Pacific Oceans must continue to be the prominent player in the creation of a regional

architecture” (Marsudi, 2018a). With regard to future regional architecture, Marsudi announced that “Indonesia will work together with countries in the region, to develop an Indo-Pacific cooperation umbrella” but within which “ASEAN centrality has to be maintained” (Marsudi, 2018a; also Sukma, 2018) as a focus for this regionalism. Marsudi reiterated on 8 May that “Indonesia’s Indo-Pacific cooperation principles are inclusive, openness, developing a habit of dialogue and respect for international law” (2018b). This cooperation vision faces the obvious challenge of how far China is ready to uphold international law in the South China Sea, given its refusal to accept the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling against it in July 2016 in the South China Sea case brought against it by the Philippines.

A prominent theme in Indonesia’s espousal of its IPCC is emphasis on ASEAN “centrality,” a call first made by Indonesia at the ASEAN Heads of Government summit in April 2018. In July, at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting, Indonesia presented a formal Indo-Pacific briefing paper, with Indonesia organising an ASEAN Senior Officials Retreat meeting in Jakarta in September 2018 to discuss Jakarta’s new Indo-Pacific concept. This draft concept was again discussed at the ASEAN Summit in November 2018, but with no publication or formal acceptance of this. Indeed, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting in January 2019 saw failure to formally adopt the Indonesian Indo-Pacific concept, with further discussion put back to civil servants officials. Criticism inside Indonesia is that this represents “buck-passing” on the part of Indonesia (Laksmana, 2018b). Traditional regionalism also suggests that ASEAN is a relatively weak institutional vehicle to firstly adopt such foreign policy positioning and secondly has little clout with external major powers.

Indonesia has also pushed its Indo-Pacific concept bilaterally within ASEAN. September 2018 witnessed discussions with Vietnam. Their *Joint Statement* recorded that “Indonesia expressed its appreciation towards Vietnam’s support on the initiative to develop an ASEAN Indo-Pacific concept” which “embraces key principles such as ASEAN centrality, openness, transparency, inclusivity, and respect for international law, while contributing to mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual benefit” (Indonesia-Vietnam, 2018). It was telling that alongside talk of “inclusivity” (a notional nod to China), the two parties “underlined the importance” of maintaining “security and freedom of navigation and overflight” and the need for “demilitarisation” in the South China Sea (an implicit warning to China).

Indonesia has also pushed its Indo-Pacific initiative onto the EAS stage, a wider forum where Indonesia’s voice is weaker than in ASEAN, and a forum that is also looser and weaker than ASEAN. Nevertheless, the EAS does provide a public platform where other significant non-ASEAN Indo-Pacific powers like the United States, Japan, China, and India are present. Indonesia formally presented its Indo-Pacific concept at the EAS Foreign Minister’s meeting in August 2018, but with no formal response from other EAS ministers. In November 2018, Widodo made the Indo-Pacific the focus of his own address to the EAS Summit. Although Widodo described “the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean as a single geo-strategic theatre” (Indonesia, 2018d), his exposition took little account of China’s growing strategic challenge in both regions. Instead, he argued that the focus of Indo-Pacific cooperation laid in relatively uncontroversial areas of

combating piracy at sea, connectivity schemes, and sustainable development. The EAS response was polite but non-committal. The Chairman's Statement released on 15 November merely noted that "we had a broad discussion on the various Indo-Pacific concepts" (EAS, 2018) which presumably referred to the various Indo-Pacific expositions by Japan, the United States (with its particularly sharp direct criticisms of China), India, and Indonesia without particularly accepting any of them.

Widodo may have won re-election as President in April 2019, but this leaves Indonesia's Indo-Pacific policy shaping running across three centres of power. Widodo continues to push the "maritime fulcrum" concept, but with a particular emphasis on domestic infrastructure development around and for the archipelago, its internal sea channels, and transit choke points. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to pursue the diplomatic stress of Natalegawa's IPTFC and Marsudi's IPCC. However, the Ministry of Defence remains more receptive to the US Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) proposals. It is to diplomacy and security that we turn.

Indo-Pacific Diplomacy

As Indonesia moves beyond its previous ASEAN/Southeast Asia horizons into the wider Indo-Pacific, important bilateral relationships are being hammered out with China, Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. Part of Indonesia's grappling with the Indo-Pacific is grappling with these other countries formulations and policies concerning the Indo-Pacific.

With regard to China, Indonesia's diplomacy has a twofold character; geopolitical competition/friction and geoeconomic cooperation. On the one hand were sharpening friction and confrontations from 2013 to 2016 over the fishing grounds around the Natuna Islands, waters where China's "9-dash line" claim overlaps with Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The Indonesian military were "dismayed" (Moeldoko, 2014) by Chinese claims. Consequently, Indonesia started to reinforce its military position in the Natuna islands during 2013 and 2014 by moving to upgrade its airbase facilities there at Ranai airbase, and holding its annual *Operation Angkasa Yudha* in October 2013 at Natuna, playing out a scenario in which Indonesia had to recapture the island from a hostile force. The Natuna waters were similarly very deliberately chosen by Indonesia to stage the March 2014 *Komodo* multilateral exercises, in which Indonesian commentators pointed out "the exercise underlines the significance of the South China Sea in Indonesia's geostrategic calculus" (Supriyanto, 2014a) and "the aggressive stance of the Chinese government by entering the Natuna area" (Jakarta Post, 2013). Some Indonesian commentators warned that China's strengthening grip in the South China Sea represented "maritime colonialism" with Chinese characteristics" (Pattiradjawane, 2016). Widodo held a Cabinet meeting in the Natuna waters in June 2016 to make the point of reaffirming Indonesian sovereignty; while in July 2017, these "troubled waters" (Liudin and Sambijantoro, 2017) were renamed by Jakarta as the North Natuna Sea, with Indonesia "shrugging off" (Sapiie, 2017) China protests. A more tangible reinforcement of Indonesia's presence was the opening of a full-blown tri-service base at Natuna in December 2018.

On the other hand, Indonesia has welcomed China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative (Damuri, 2014; Gokkon, 2014; Luhulima, 2014), which was announced by Xi Jinping in November 2013 in front of the Indonesian Parliament. Summit meetings between Widodo and Xi Jinping have been cordial. Two years on from 2013, and their *Joint Statement* in March 2015 brought the comments that both sides agreed that "the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road proposed by President Xi Jinping and the strategy of the Global Maritime Fulcrum initiated by President Joko Widodo are highly complementary to each other," enabling "advance maritime infrastructure connectivity" (Indonesia-China, 2015).

Five years on from 2013, and their *Joint Statement* in May 2018 brought their sense of "the progress made over the past 5 years since the establishment of China-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, particularly in synergizing China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiative and Indonesia's Vision of Global Maritime Fulcrum" (Indonesia-China, 2018; also Sriyanto, 2018, Yuniarni, 2018). Specific projects highlighted were the "ongoing" construction of Jakarta-Bandung High Speed Railway Project," the planned joint development of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Corridor "within the Belt and Road Initiative cooperation and the Global Maritime Fulcrum framework," and the further "efforts" toward the conclusion of the Code of Conduct on the South China Sea "at an early date" (Indonesia-China, 2018). The sceptic could note that these were future projections, since none of them had been completed.

With regard to Australia, Indonesia's relations have converged within an Indo-Pacific framework. It is no surprise to find that in the Australia-Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministers 2+2 Dialogue meeting in December 2015, the Indonesian ministers agreed with their Australian counterparts that "Australia and Indonesia are strategic partners with a shared commitment to a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region" (Indonesia-Australia, 2015). A further Indo-Pacific twist was the Indonesia proposal made at the 2+2 Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting in October 2016 for joint naval patrol in the South China Sea. This was denounced in the Chinese media as "imprudent" and cutting across the economic synergy between China's MSR initiative and Widodo's global maritime nexus (Du, 2016).

Indo-Pacific convergence was on show with the *Joint Statement* drawn up by Indonesia and Australia for the 2+2 ministerial meeting in March 2018. The meeting gave the context as "the geo-strategic shifts underway in the Indo-Pacific," where the Foreign and Defense "Ministers emphasized our two countries" shared interest in an Indo-Pacific region that is open, transparent, inclusive, rules-based, prosperous and resilient, in which the rights of all states are respected," and where "they further emphasized that all countries should act in a way that enhances stability and reinforces international law" (Indonesia-Australia, 2018). Their comments on "geo-strategic shifts in the Indo-Pacific" and on South China Sea "recent developments" were aimed at China, especially their common stress on non-militarisation, and freedom of navigation and over-flight; though the word "inclusive" was a nod to Indonesian concerns not to antagonise China (Indonesia-Australia, 2018).

With regard to India, a "strategic partnership" was proclaimed in 2005. Within that partnership, maritime security cooperation is perhaps the most significant, as both

countries share a common maritime boundary as Indian Ocean littoral states explicitly concerned about piracy and implicitly concerned about China (Supriyanto, 2013a: 2). Indonesia's then Vice Foreign Minister Dino Djalal (2014) put it simply that "India and Indonesia can work together to create an Indo-Pacific maritime axis." Joint (CORPAT) patrols of their maritime boundaries were elevated in April 2014 to joint exercises, involving greater number of navy vessels.

This Indo-Pacific convergence was also at the forefront with the *Shared Vision of India-Indonesia maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* agreed between Widodo and Modi in May 2018. In their *Shared Vision* statement, the "Indo-Pacific" was mentioned ten times. It recorded "the convergences and complementarities in the region between India's Act East Policy and Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum Vision" (Indonesia-India, 2018; also Supriyanto, 2018). Indo-Pacific cooperation through the Indian Ocean Regional Association (IORA) and ASEAN-led mechanisms was highlighted, as was bilateral maritime cooperation, subsequently carried out through initiating the *Samudra Sakti* naval exercises in November 2018. The Chinese media remain sensitive over Indonesia-India military cooperation (Hu, 2018). The *Shared Vision* focus on "inclusive" reflected both countries' desire to not antagonise China too overtly; though China was implicitly in mind with the *Shared Vision* comments on "reiterating the importance of achieving a free, open, transparent, rules-based, peaceful, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region" where "sovereignty and territorial integrity, international law, in particular UNCLOS, freedom of navigation and overflight are respected" (Indonesia-India, 2018).

With regard to Japan, maritime security has accelerated in recent years. In their 2015 summit, the Widodo and Abe pinpointed "their commitment to strengthen the Strategic Partnership underpinned by sea and democracy" (Indonesia-Japan, 2015). An ongoing Japan-Indonesia *Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting 2 + 2* format was introduced in December 2015. Similarly, the Japan-Indonesia Maritime Forum was initiated in December 2016, further meeting in March 2018, to further their maritime security cooperation.

The Widodo-Abe summit in January 2017 was specific on Indonesian hopes, in which "President Joko Widodo appreciated any initiative to connect Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean, including in the economic field" (Indonesia-Japan, 2017). What seems apparent is that Indonesia is most interested in the economics of Japan's FOIP strategy, and Tokyo's readiness to support Indonesian infrastructure projects. Such a focus on connectivity and infrastructure initiatives underpinned Japan's emphasis at the *High Level Dialogue on the Indo-Pacific*, organised by Indonesia in April 2019 on how Japan's own FOIP concept was fully in line with Indonesia's Indo-Pacific proposals (Sonoura, 2019).

Both states remain concerned about China's push down into the South China Sea. Japan has moved to help Indonesia establish greater control over these disputed waters. September 2017 saw Japan commit to supply radar equipment and supply patrol vessels for Indonesia use on Natuna, while June 2018 saw further Japanese financial assistance to upgrade Indonesian fishing ports and storage centres in the Natuna archipelago. Strategic Dialogue talks in June 2018 were welcomed by Indonesia, in which "both

Ministers also expressed concern over the occurrence of militarization in the South China Sea region” and that “the two Foreign Ministers also agreed to synergize the Indonesian-initiated Indo-Pacific concept with the concept of Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy from Japan” (Indonesia, 2018a; also Sheany, 2018). The word “inclusive,” often used so as not to antagonise China, was not included in their declaration.

With regard to the United States, since 1996, the Indonesian navy has been militarily cooperating with the United States under the US Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) programme. The CARAT Indonesia 2018 sea phase involved gunnery and air defence exercises. Indonesia has also joined the US-hosted Pacific Air Chiefs Symposium in 2017, centred on the theme “Challenges to Regional Security: Promoting Combined Operations in the Indo-Asia-Pacific.” This forum involved air chiefs from across the Indo-Pacific but not China.

Indonesia followed a careful approach during 2018 to the US FOIP strategy. Indonesia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ report on 6 August about the Marsudi-Pompeo discussions was that “both countries will further encourage trade and investment cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region” but that “Minister Retno reiterated the key pillars of Indonesia’s concept of Indo-Pacific: promoting inclusiveness, habit of dialogue, and respect of international law” (Indonesia, 2018b). Similarly, the Indonesian Ministry of Defense report on 28 August about the Ryacudu-Mattis discussions was that “Indonesia also agreed with the concept of the Free and Open Indo Pacific Policy (FOIP) which has proven a significant role in building stability in the Indo Pacific region” (Indonesia, 2018c). Nevertheless, Indonesia highlighted “prioritizing the economic aspect approach by emphasizing the principle of inclusiveness,” and sought assurances “that FOIP is not aimed at certain countries” and that FOIP “recognizes the importance of ASEAN’s position as the main regional construct in the Indo-Pacific region” (Indonesia, 2018c). Finally, Indonesia’s Foreign Ministry take on the Widodo-Pence meeting on 14 November was that “the President conveyed cooperation to maintain peace and security in the region, including collaboration for the development of the Indo Pacific” and that “synergy” (Indonesia, 2018c) was feasible between Indonesian and US Indo-Pacific formulations. Mutual Indo-Pacific defence convergence was at the fore of the Ryacudu-Shanahan discussions in May 2019.

Within Indonesia’s Foreign Ministry, Jose Antonio Morato Tavares, the Director General of ASEAN Cooperation, differentiated Indonesia’s Indo-Pacific proposal from the ones given by the United States and Japan. On the one hand, “the Indo-Pacific concept initiated by the President is different from the one proposed by the United States. We speak about soft approach and people to people”; whereas “the one by the United States speaks about military power. The concept proposed by Japan is about assistance for the regional countries related to infrastructure development” (Antara, 2018a). Two criticisms can be made. Firstly, Tavares narrowed the United States and Japanese FOIP proposals to just being about military or just being about economic (whereas they include both, and more). Secondly, it raises the question whether the self-avowed “soft approach” of Indonesia’s IPCC is a little bit too soft an approach, lacking much substance?

Conclusions

This article has found that while Indonesia has been successful in extending its own presence as an actor in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans, it has been much less successful in establishing itself as a maritime power and that so far its call for an Indo-Pacific Treaty of Cooperation, and Friendship (IPTCF), and its IPCC have been relatively ineffectual in the face of continued Chinese expansionism and growing Great Power competition in the region. Indonesia is also facing different pulls in its diplomacy with Australia, India, Japan, and the United States.

Retno Marsudi's Annual Press Statement in January 2019, complete with a large screen backdrop titled "Indo-Pacific Cooperation," may have included her judgement that "for Indonesia, the two oceans, the Pacific and the Indian are a single geo-strategic theatre" (Marsudi, 2019), but it remains unclear how Indonesia foreign, economic, and defence strategies are working through this single envisaged arena. Her comment that "we must ensure that the Indian and Pacific Oceans are not used as a venue for natural resource struggles, territorial disputes and maritime supremacy" (Marsudi, 2019) is laudable but is dependent on those powers like China that may be involved in such matters rather than Indonesia.

As regards Indonesia's espousal during 2013 to 2014 of an *IPTFC*, it was open to criticisms in and around Indonesia. Bandoro (2013: 5) argued that "while the idea behind the treaty is good," nevertheless in an anarchic system "political realism underlines the competitive and aggressive nature of international affairs in which power defines relations," and so "leaving any Indo-Pacific treaty a paper construct." Indeed, such an Indo-Pacific Treaty has not actually been drafted, let alone open for ratification, nor given institutional expression in theory or practice.

Moreover, it could be argued that an *IPTFC* is unnecessary, given the existence of the ASEAN-drafted *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation* (TAC). The existing TAC is a de facto Indo-Pacific Treaty since though initially set up in 1976 for the Southeast Asia/ASEAN countries the TAC has been signed by a wider circle of countries from across the Indo-Pacific, including India and China in 2003, Japan in 2004, Australia in 2005, and the United States in 2009. Indeed, signing the TAC is a prerequisite for joining the wider EAS mechanism, yet this general signing up to the TAC has failed to affect the rising frictions in the East China Sea and South China Sea.

As regards Indonesian espousal after 2014 of a *maritime nexus*, this remains futuristic. The challenge in 2014 was whether Indonesia's quest for maritime power was "vision or fantasy" (Rusdi, 2014). Uncertainties affect both financial allocations to maritime projects and maritime forces, "actualizing Indonesia's shift from maritime player to maritime power [. . .] Indonesia should assume maritime power first before establishing itself as maritime axis of the world" (Rustam, 2014). By the end of 2018, Indonesia had made some progress in its internal maritime sector (Jakarta Post, 2018), but further funding is necessary. Indonesia has various options in the shape of China's Silk Road Fund, the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Japanese-led Asian Development Bank's Asia Regional Trade and Connectivity Fund, or even the recently set up US-Japan-Australia Infrastructure Fund.

With regard to Indonesia's external maritime projection, the goal was set that "by endorsing the maritime axis, the Indonesian Navy should be transformed into a respected maritime force in the Indo-Pacific region" (Ramadhani and Aliabbas, 2015). It remains unclear though if Indonesia's inward-looking strategic culture really has been overcome (Arif and Yandry, 2017). The Indonesian navy continues to focus on maritime law enforcement and security in the internal and archipelagic waters, rather than external inter-state focus and deployments. In terms of hardware, naval weaknesses remain, and the Indonesian navy remains a palpably weak instrument, a "small navy, big responsibilities" (Agastia, 2017). Maritime Domain Awareness to secure Indonesia's territorial water and EEZ, especially in the South China Sea, remains too limited (Agastia and Perwita, 2017). The official navy website <http://www.tnial.mil.id> may continue to run the banner *World Class Navy*, but this reflects future as yet unrealised aspirations rather than present capacities.

As regards Indonesian espousal since 2018 of an IPCC, it remains a theoretical project rather than realised initiative. As of mid-2019, after 18 months, it was still awaiting any formal adoption by ASEAN, while the EAS has merely noted it as one of various competing Indo-Pacific proposals. Bilaterally Indonesia's IPCC call for cooperation and inclusivity means that nobody has really rejected it as such, but it has not led to anything tangible.

Traditional regionalism is reflected in Indonesia's focus on ASEAN as a continuing regional vehicle, but the problem of applying traditional regionalism is that there is little Indo-Pacific regional structuring, the closest being the EAS, which has little integrative power, and is divided by different Indo-Pacific visions being pushed there by India, Indonesia, China, Japan, and the United States – these divisions reflecting the role of critical regionalism and critical geopolitics. Amid these divided concepts of region, Indonesia has been unable to get the EAS to back its particular Indo-Pacific formulations.

The risk continues that bland Indo-Pacific declarations from Indonesia, with its insistence on "inclusivity" so as not to upset China, avoid addressing key security issues which continue to revolve around China's militarisation and expansionism in the South China Sea (which includes Chinese maritime claims in waters around Indonesia's Natuna archipelago), China's growing naval presence in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean, and China's questionable MSR geoeconomic undertones of "debt diplomacy." Questions have been raised within Indonesia over the government's embrace of Chinese MSR funding.

Economic cooperation remains the continuing refrain from Indonesia. On 23 October 2018, Marsudi stated at the Jakarta Geopolitical Forum that "Indonesia's IPCC promises a mutually beneficial geopolitical situation by prioritizing collaboration for a common interest, including the creation of new growth centers" (Antara, 2018a). However, such, perhaps, assumption by Indonesia of economic collaboration in the Indo-Pacific underplays the destabilising and competitive "geopolitical situation" posed by China's military assertiveness in the South China Sea, and China's growing naval presence more widely across the Indo-Pacific? Some Indonesian commentators have argued that "cooperation on efforts to implement Indonesia's 'maritime axis', China's 'maritime silk road' [...] could work for the benefit of peace, stability and

development in the Indo-Pacific countries and region” (Djalal, 2016). This sidesteps the question of whether China’s MSR scheme is really a question of win-win cooperation, and whether it is really compatible with Indonesian reiteration of a transparent and open Indo-Pacific.

The danger remains that Indonesia’s Indo-Pacific strategy may be a weak play amid its unresolved naval weakness, increasing pressure of great power politics, a divided and powerless ASEAN, unenforceable principles, and a vaguely outlined and ineffective multilateral approach. One Indonesian commentator was blunt: “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,” in which “Indonesia’s sole goal is, in essence, to avoid being dragged into conflict” (Sulaiman, 2019: 3).

On January 2019, Marsudi’s Annual Press Statement included the bland call that “Indonesia, along with ASEAN member countries invites all partners to continue to develop the concept of ‘Indo-Pacific’ cooperation” (Marsudi, 2019). Indonesia had been keen to promote its IPCC at its High Level Dialogue on Indo Pacific Cooperation, subtitled “Towards a Peaceful, Prosperous, and Inclusive Region,” chaired by Marsudi in Jakarta on 20 March 2019, with ministers and officials from the various EAS countries attending. No one rejected Indonesia’s particular IPCC, yet the meeting failed to clarify the IPCC’s relationship to the FOIP concept being pushed by Japan and the United States nor to address the problems surrounding Chinese actions in the South China Sea and the questionable nature of its MSR initiative. The lack of Joint Statement or of any specific actions agreed was revealing.

A further challenge for Indonesia is that it may be argued that the Indonesia’s public invitation for China to join in its own IPCC may merely enable China to avoid closer security scrutiny in the Indo-Pacific? Widodo’s hope at the ASEAN-China Summit in November 2018 were that “China will become a partner for ASEAN in maritime sector cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, including in overcoming maritime security in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, overcoming marine pollution, and developing search and rescue capacity in the ocean” (Cabinet Secretariat, 2018). This is feasible for matters of maritime pollution, search and rescue, and anti-piracy security but perhaps avoids dealing with China’s fundamental security threat to ASEAN posed by Beijing’s assertiveness in the South China Sea? The ASEAN Summit in late-June 2019 may have finally followed Indonesia’s IPCC proposals and issued the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific; but it suffered from the same problems of generalities, vagueness, cooperation assumptions, perhaps wishful thinking, and avoidance of key China-related security issues.

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