

Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum Strategy: Navigating Great Power Competition and Regional Leadership in Indo-Pacific Security (2014-2024)

Elpeni Fitrah¹, Arief Bakhtiar Darmawan², Raden Mokhamad Luthfi³

¹² Department of International Relations, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Indonesia

³ International Doctoral Program in Asia-Pacific Studies, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Date received: 19 March 2025 Revision date: 08 October 2025 Date published: 06 November 2025</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords <i>Global Maritime Fulcrum;</i> <i>Indonesian Foreign Policy;</i> <i>Middle Power Diplomacy;</i> <i>Indo-Pacific Security;</i> <i>Maritime Strategy</i></p> <hr/> <p>Correspondence Email: elpeni.fitrah@unsoed.ac.id</p>	<p>This article analyzes Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) strategy from 2014 to 2024, tracing its transformation from a domestic development initiative to a refined diplomatic tool for managing great power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. This research utilizes a qualitative case study technique with process tracing to examine official documents, diplomatic exchanges, and quantitative measurements, framed by middle power theory and maritime strategy concepts. The findings indicate that Indonesia's GMF strategy evolved through three distinct phases, achieving significant milestones such as a 234% enhancement in maritime surveillance coverage, the establishment of 89 bilateral maritime cooperation agreements, and effective mediation in regional maritime disputes with an 83% success rate. These results markedly surpassed earlier academic forecasts, demonstrating Indonesia's adept utilization of its geographic advantages and diplomatic skills to establish regional leadership despite the limitations of its middle power status. Despite the GMF's effectiveness being constrained by intensifying great power rivalry and internal limitations, Indonesia has adeptly established itself as a crucial player in Indo-Pacific maritime governance through the integration of institutional development, diplomatic efforts, and operational collaboration, providing significant insights into middle power conduct in intricate regional security contexts.</p>

INTRODUCTION

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as the epicenter of global geopolitics, characterized by intensifying great power competition between the United States and China, alongside a growing significance of middle powers. Indonesia's position as the world's largest archipelagic nation and a key regional actor renders it particularly crucial in this context. Indonesia's strategic position, bridging the Indian and Pacific Oceans and connecting Asia and Australia, has made it a focal point for competing great power interests (Pratiwi et al, 2021). Regional political, economic, and security dynamics increasingly depend on Indonesia's stability and foreign policy decisions, highlighting its crucial role as a leader within ASEAN.

Since 2014, under President Joko Widodo, Indonesia has implemented the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) strategy, aimed at reaffirming the country as a maritime power and enhancing regional security (Pratiwi et al, 2021). Jokowi initially presented the GMF vision at the 2014 East Asia Summit, characterizing it as Indonesia's new maritime doctrine intended to enhance marine culture, infrastructure, diplomacy, and defense. The GMF concept integrates domestic development

aims with foreign policy objectives, establishing Indonesia as a "fulcrum" between the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Laksmana, 2019). It was broadly seen as a prospective grand plan to use Indonesia's extensive marine resources and geostrategic location for regional dominance (Pratiwi et al, 2021). The approach has emerged in the context of escalating maritime security problems, encompassing territorial conflicts in the South China Sea, particularly concerning the Natuna Islands, and strategic rivalry for regional economic projects. These challenges have heightened Indonesia's importance in regional leadership, as Jakarta endeavors to uphold a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific in the face of external rivalry.

Indonesia's GMF strategy emerges at a critical juncture in Indo-Pacific geopolitics, where competing visions of regional order intersect with institutional debates about governance architecture. The intensification of U.S.-China strategic competition has generated parallel and sometimes contradictory regional frameworks: Washington's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) emphasizing liberal democratic values and rules-based order, and Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) prioritizing economic connectivity and development partnerships (Pratiwi et al, 2021). This bifurcation poses fundamental challenges to ASEAN centrality—the long-standing principle that Southeast Asian nations, through ASEAN, should remain at the center of regional security architecture. Simultaneously, the rise of minilateral arrangements—such as the Quad (US, Japan, India, Australia) and AUKUS (Australia, UK, US)—has introduced alternative governance modalities that potentially bypass ASEAN-led mechanisms. These minilateral frameworks offer flexibility and operational efficiency but risk fragmenting regional cooperation and marginalizing smaller states from key security deliberations. Indonesia's GMF strategy must therefore navigate between maintaining ASEAN centrality and engaging pragmatically with emerging minilateral structures, while preserving strategic autonomy amid great power pressures.

The GMF represents Indonesia's attempt to transcend this dilemma by positioning itself as a maritime "fulcrum"—neither fully aligned with competing great power visions nor isolated from beneficial partnerships. This approach reflects what Abbondanza (2022) terms "strategic hedging through institutional entrepreneurship," whereby middle powers create alternative frameworks that accommodate multiple interests without surrendering policy autonomy. Indonesia's advancement of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in 2019 exemplifies this strategy, offering an inclusive, ASEAN-centered alternative to both FOIP and BRI while remaining compatible with elements of both frameworks.

Scholarly discussions over Indonesia's maritime strategy have evolved through distinct phases, each emphasizing different dimensions of the GMF's development and implementation. Initial analyses focused predominantly on the formulation of the GMF and its domestic execution. Alda and Nafilah (2022) argued that the GMF's five pillars, which encompass the revitalization of maritime culture and the enhancement of naval capabilities, are "much more about domestic development than about foreign policy," illustrating Jokowi's identity as a domestic reformer rather than an internationalist. During this initial phase, Indonesia concentrated on enhancing domestic maritime infrastructure, protecting marine resources, and asserting sovereignty, demonstrated by crackdowns on illicit fishing, while placing comparatively less attention on overseas diplomatic efforts. Other researchers emphasized the securitization efforts during these years, observing significant navy involvement in safeguarding Indonesia's maritime territory, despite the government's commitment to fostering regional stability. Research conducted by Alda and Nafilah (2022) elucidates the preliminary conception and implementation of the GMF, indicating that it was not a comprehensive grand strategy but rather a framework requiring further development and guidance.

Recently, academic focus has transitioned to Indonesia's maritime diplomacy and the junction of the Global Maritime Fulcrum with great power struggle. Researchers have commenced analysis of Indonesia's external maritime policy and its navigation of the U.S.–China competition in the Indo-Pacific region. Pratiwi et al. (2021) contend that Indonesia expressly employed the GMF as a middle power strategy to counterbalance and address China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the United States' Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision. Their research indicates that the GMF functioned as Indonesia's diplomatic instrument to engage both parties without excessive alignment with either, exemplifying Jakarta's hedging strategy in the pursuit of regional stability. Similarly, Indonesia's maritime diplomats have endeavored to utilize platforms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the G20 to promote collaborative standards, thereby alleviating tensions among great powers. Recent assessments illustrate Indonesia's proactive strategic narrative, establishing itself at the core of Indo-Pacific geopolitics and advocating for a narrative of inclusive cooperation to mitigate rivalry. In 2019, Jakarta advanced the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) to uphold ASEAN centrality and a rules-based regional order amid U.S.–China rivalry.

Despite these valuable contributions, existing scholarship exhibits three critical gaps that this study addresses. First, temporal limitations: most analyses examine only the early years of GMF implementation (2014–2018), offering limited insight into how the strategy evolved throughout Jokowi's complete decade in office (2014–2024). Laksmana's (2019) influential "post-mortem analysis" concluded prematurely that the GMF had "lost momentum," yet subsequent developments—including the 2019 AOIP launch, expanded maritime infrastructure investments, and enhanced regional cooperation frameworks—suggest a more complex trajectory than early assessments recognized. This temporal gap prevents comprehensive evaluation of the GMF's long-term effectiveness and adaptation to evolving regional dynamics.

Second, analytical depth: existing studies tend toward either purely descriptive accounts of GMF policies or normative assessments of their desirability, without systematically examining causal mechanisms linking policy decisions to regional outcomes. While Pratiwi et al. (2021) identify the GMF as a hedging strategy, they do not trace how specific institutional developments, capacity-building initiatives, or diplomatic engagements produced measurable effects on regional maritime governance. The absence of systematic process tracing and quantitative measurement leaves unclear whether observed regional changes resulted from Indonesian diplomacy, great power dynamics, or other factors. This analytical gap undermines our understanding of middle power efficacy in complex security environments.

Third, theoretical integration: current literature inadequately integrates Indonesia's maritime strategy with broader theoretical debates about middle power behavior in regional security complexes. Studies either treat Indonesia as a unique case shaped by archipelagic geography and ASEAN leadership, or apply middle power theory generically without accounting for maritime-specific dynamics. This theoretical gap limits our ability to derive generalizable insights about how middle powers leverage maritime capabilities for regional influence, or how maritime geography shapes middle power strategic options differently than land-based contexts.

This article addresses these gaps by examining the evolution of Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum strategy from 2014 to 2024, emphasizing its significance in managing great power rivalry and promoting regional stability in the Indo-Pacific. The analysis unfolds across three interconnected dimensions:

1. Strategic Evolution: How has Indonesia modified its maritime diplomacy in response to emerging regional challenges throughout Jokowi's decade in office? What factors drove shifts in GMF priorities and implementation approaches across different phases?
2. Middle Power Leadership: What strategies has Jakarta utilized to establish leadership in regional security matters while maintaining its strategic autonomy amid intensifying great power competition? How effective have these strategies proven in shaping regional maritime governance?
3. Domestic-International Linkages: What impact have domestic capacity-building initiatives (such as naval modernization, institutional coordination, and infrastructure development) had on Indonesia's regional maritime influence and diplomatic credibility?

We assert that Indonesia's GMF policy has evolved from a domestically focused marine development initiative into a sophisticated diplomatic tool designed to maintain Indonesia's strategic autonomy and enhance stability in the Indo-Pacific region. This transition indicates Indonesia's increasing recognition of its status as a maritime middle power and its capacity to influence regional security dynamics to its advantage (Pratiwi et al, 2021). However, the GMF's efficacy has been constrained by multiple factors: the intensifying competition among external great powers, Indonesia's internal capacity limitations, and the ongoing challenge of aligning economic interests with security requirements. Jokowi's emphasis on infrastructure and investment, demonstrated by his 2019 shift from overt maritime discourse to a goal of "economic transformation," occasionally compromised marine strategic priorities (Laksmana, 2019). These trade-offs exemplify the tension between engaging in development partnerships, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative, and protecting sovereignty and security in disputed territories.

It began as an economic community with six member states in the 1950s and has grown into the world's largest trading block with a single market and a common currency, the euro. Since the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, the European Union is not only an economic union but also a political union with the aim of creating "an ever-closer union of the peoples of Europe". In recent years, however, deeper European integration has been blocked by the governments of its member states and by several referenda since the early 2000s. Europe, for a long preoccupied with its own challenges (Euro crisis, mass immigration, Brexit) has now finally reacted and is trying to pay more attention to the Indo-Pacific region. However, if the geopolitical pivot to the Indo-Pacific was a race, then the European Union risks being left behind at the turn (Ruyt 2022). As a result, the European Union and its member states have increased their engagement in East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, a world region now called Indo-Pacific. National Indo-Pacific strategies have recently been developed in different ways by France, Germany and the Netherlands. They have provided the impetus for the EU's efforts to develop a more forceful strategy for the region. This work culminated in the publication of the European Council Conclusions on the "EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" in April 2021. In recent years, the EU has also become more active in the Indo-Pacific region through strategic partnerships (e.g., with Japan, South Korea, India, ASEAN), maritime security missions (such as CRIMARIO II, which supports maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean) and inter-regional cooperation on non-traditional security threats like cyber security, climate change, pandemics, terrorism, etc.

However, the extent to which all these EU initiatives in the Indo-Pacific are accepted by the countries concerned in the region has not yet been well researched by scholars (Abbondanza/Wilkins 2024). For the purposes of this article, I would like to focus on the ASEAN region and, more specifically, on one country: the Philippines. The archipelagic state is a major Southeast Asian

country with a population of more than 100 million, and it is a very appropriate case study because it is neither a military or economic superpower nor a rather insignificant small country. Because of its geostrategic location, its central role in the South China Sea dispute, and its position as a key U.S. treaty ally in the region, the Philippines is crucial for understanding the political dynamics of the Indo-Pacific.

My two research questions, which are closely related to each other, are: How is the EU's new attention to the Indo-Pacific perceived among the political elites and the general public in the Philippines? Do the national government and the general public appreciate the EU's efforts or not? In a first step, I will briefly introduce the aforementioned EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific of April 2021, its intentions and its close ideological connection to liberal theories of International Relations (IR). In the next step, I will outline the overall foreign policy of the Philippines in the recent past and especially highlighting the impact of the superpower rivalry between the US and China on the archipelago in order to better understand the influence of the EU on Philippine foreign policy. This is followed by the main analytical part of this paper, where I will draw some preliminary conclusions on the main research question of how the EU's Indo-Pacific cooperation strategy has been perceived in the Philippines. This study fills a critical gap in academic literature. While there have been several publications on the EU's Indo-China policy (such as Grare/Reuter 2021 or Tan/Lin 2024), none have explicitly examined perceptions from the Philippines. Moreover, this research provides valuable insights into the foreign policy perceptions of a relevant ASEAN member country, the Philippines, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of international relations in Southeast Asia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study methodology with process tracing to examine Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) strategy during Joko Widodo's presidency (2014-2024). This approach enables systematic investigation of complex policy processes and their outcomes while identifying causal mechanisms linking policy decisions to regional effects (Bennett and Checkel, 2023). Our process tracing specifically targets three causal mechanisms derived from middle power theory and maritime strategy literature:

1. Mechanism 1: Capability-Credibility Linkage - Enhanced maritime capabilities increase diplomatic credibility and regional influence. Traced pathway: Policy decision → Budget allocation → Capability development → Demonstrated operational capacity → Enhanced diplomatic leverage → Regional cooperation outcomes.
2. Mechanism 2: Institutional Entrepreneurship - Creating maritime cooperation frameworks provides agenda-setting authority and positions Indonesia as regional facilitator. Traced pathway: Governance gap identification → Indonesian initiative → Framework negotiation → Institutional establishment → Regional norm diffusion.
3. Mechanism 3: Strategic Hedging - Balanced great power engagement through maritime diplomacy preserves strategic autonomy. Traced pathway: Great power rivalry intensification → Hedging strategy formulation → Selective engagement → Diversified partnerships → Preserved autonomy.

For each mechanism, we apply four causal inference tests (Bennett and Checkel, 2023): (1) temporal sequence - does cause precede effect? (2) covariation - do changes in cause correspond with

outcome changes? (3) causal process observations - can we identify mechanism indicators in policy documents and diplomatic records? (4) alternative explanations - have competing explanations been systematically evaluated?

Concrete Example: To establish that BAKAMLA capability enhancement (2017-2020) increased Indonesia's diplomatic influence, we traced: BAKAMLA budget increase from IDR 2.1 to 4.8 trillion (2017) → establishment of 12 maritime command centers (2017-2019) → successful mediation of three maritime disputes (2019-2020) → leadership of regional initiatives (2020-2021). Diplomatic correspondence explicitly linked enhanced capabilities to diplomatic authority, while we assessed alternative explanations (threat perceptions, ASEAN initiatives, great power influence) and found Indonesian capability-building as necessary contributing cause.

Data collection employed three tiers:

1. Tier 1: Policy Documents - Presidential speeches (n=47), Presidential Regulation No. 16/2017, Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Foreign Affairs annual reports, BAKAMLA operational reports, Indonesian Navy capability plans (2014-2024). These sources reveal strategic reasoning and policy objectives.
2. Tier 2: Diplomatic Communications - Bilateral maritime cooperation agreements (n=89), ASEAN summit communiqués, maritime dispute mediation records, joint statements from security forums, diplomatic responses to maritime incidents. These provide evidence of implementation effectiveness and regional reception.
3. Tier 3: Quantitative Metrics - Maritime security incident statistics (IMO, ReCAAP), naval capability data (IISS Military Balance), trade and infrastructure data (UNCTAD), budget data (Ministry of Finance/Defense reports). These offer objective measurements of policy outcomes.

We integrate these tiers through systematic triangulation, assigning analytical weight based on evidential value for specific claims:

Table 1. Data Triangulation Framework

Source: Author-created. Based on Bennett and Checkel (2023) process tracing framework and integrated data from Indonesian government sources and ASEAN records (2014-2024)

Research Question	Primary Source (Tier 1)	Secondary Source (Tier 2)	Tertiary Source (Tier 3)	Triangulation Purpose
Policy Evolution: How did GMF priorities shift?	Policy documents showing stated priorities	Diplomatic agreements revealing actual priorities	Budget data, capability metrics showing implemented priorities	Validation: Ensure stated priorities align with implementation; Interpretation: Understand rhetoric-action gaps
Causal Mechanisms: Did capability-building	Strategic assessments linking capabilities to objectives	Diplomatic correspondence showing capability leverage	Quantitative correlation between capabilities and cooperation	Validation: Verify causal claims; Interpretation: Distinguish

enhance influence?				correlation from causation
Regional Impact: Did Indonesia shape maritime governance?	Indonesian policy claims	Regional partners' responses in agreements	International assessments of cooperation trends	Validation: Cross-check claims against external evaluations; Interpretation: Assess genuine vs. symbolic influence

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) strategy from 2014 to 2024, based on official documents, diplomatic records, institutional reports, and quantitative data, reveals how Indonesia leveraged its geographic position and diplomatic capabilities to establish regional leadership while navigating great power rivalry. However, we emphasize that while Indonesia's GMF initiatives contributed significantly to regional maritime governance improvements, these outcomes resulted from complex interactions between Indonesian diplomacy, evolving regional threat perceptions, ASEAN institutional dynamics, and great power strategic calculations. Our process tracing identifies Indonesian agency as a necessary but not sufficient condition for observed regional stability enhancements.

Evolution and Institutional Development of Indonesia's Maritime Strategy

Indonesia's GMF strategy progressed through three distinct phases spanning the decade (2014-2024), each characterized by strategic institutional development demonstrating deliberate advancement of maritime governance capabilities. The first phase (2014-2016) focused on institutional foundation-building, with the establishment of the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs addressing the fragmented maritime governance that plagued previous administrations (Laksmana and Wicaksana, 2023). Presidential Regulation No. 16/2017 provided statutory authority for coherent policy implementation across government agencies (Ramadhan et al., 2023). The allocation of IDR 78.3 trillion for maritime infrastructure—a 156% increase from previous budgets—signaled a paradigm shift in strategic priorities (Ministry of Finance Annual Report, 2023). Our process tracing reveals the causal pathway: institutional consolidation → enhanced inter-agency coordination → accelerated policy implementation. Documentary evidence shows that prior to 2014, maritime policy suffered from jurisdictional conflicts among 17 different agencies. The Coordinating Ministry's establishment reduced coordination time for joint operations from an average of 47 days (2013) to 12 days (2016), directly enabling faster responses to maritime incidents. This institutional reform was associated with—though not solely responsible for—subsequent improvements in maritime enforcement, as improved coordination coincided with increased political will and budget allocations. This institutional investment exemplifies what Abbondanza (2022) terms strategic autonomy development—middle powers cultivating independent material capabilities to exert regional influence. However, we note that Indonesia's institutional reforms also responded to external pressures, particularly ASEAN commitments and international maritime security standards, suggesting that domestic capacity-building and regional normative pressures operated synergistically.

The second phase (2017-2020) concentrated on capability enhancement and operational integration. BAKAMLA's enhancement with expanded operational authority addressed critical

enforcement gaps (Ackert, 2023). Budget increases from IDR 2.1 trillion to IDR 4.8 trillion enabled creation of 12 integrated maritime security command centers strategically positioned across archipelagic waterways (BAKAMLA Strategic Review, 2024). This network substantially improved what Ariadno (2021) terms “maritime domain awareness infrastructure.” Quantitative indicators show significant capability improvements: patrol vessels increased from 8 (2014) to 27 units (2024), expanding surveillance coverage from 23% to 77% of Indonesia’s maritime domain—a 234% enhancement. Maritime law enforcement operations surged 156% to 1,247 operations (2023). The Indonesian Navy expanded from 151 to 178 vessels, adding 8 frigates and 4 submarines (Indonesian Navy Strategic Review, 2024). Maritime defense expenditure rose 189% (2014-2024). However, establishing causality between these capability enhancements and regional influence requires careful analysis. Our process tracing documents temporal precedence: capability improvements (2017-2019) preceded increased diplomatic engagement requests. Regional partners’ diplomatic correspondence explicitly referenced Indonesia’s enhanced capabilities as rationale for seeking cooperation. For instance, Malaysia’s 2019 maritime cooperation proposal stated: “Indonesia’s demonstrated surveillance capabilities position it as an ideal partner for joint maritime security initiatives” (MFA Database, 2019).

Yet alternative explanations exist—regional partners may have sought Indonesian cooperation due to rising maritime threats (illegal fishing increased 34% regionally 2016-2018 per ReCAAP data) rather than Indonesian capabilities per se. We conclude that capability development contributed to but did not solely determine Indonesia’s enhanced regional standing. The mechanism operated through credibility enhancement: demonstrated capabilities signaled commitment and competence, making Indonesia a more attractive cooperation partner. This supports Niazi’s (2024) “capacity-based credibility” concept while acknowledging that threat environment and regional demand for leadership also shaped outcomes. Lee (2018) observed that “Indonesia’s swift improvement of maritime enforcement capabilities has outstripped similar developments in other ASEAN nations,” creating new paradigms for regional maritime security governance. This acceleration reflects what Putri (2023) identifies as the “maritime identity imperative”—increasing recognition that national identity and strategic interests are fundamentally intertwined with maritime capabilities.

The third phase (2021-2024) emphasized infrastructure consolidation and regional framework building. Implementation of 24 maritime infrastructure projects totaling IDR 124.5 trillion—including port modernization, shipping channel improvements, and 35 fishing ports—strengthened physical maritime infrastructure and state presence (Ministry of Maritime Affairs Annual Report, 2024). This aligns with Uphadyaya’s (2022) argument that effective maritime strategy requires balanced attention to security and economic dimensions. Infrastructure development was associated with enhanced regional connectivity and cooperation opportunities. However, correlation does not establish causation—infrastructure improvements occurred alongside China’s Belt and Road Initiative investments in regional maritime infrastructure, making it difficult to isolate Indonesian contributions to regional connectivity from broader infrastructure development trends. Our process tracing suggests that Indonesian infrastructure specifically facilitated bilateral cooperation through: (1) providing logistical support for joint patrols (documented in 23 bilateral agreements), (2) enabling information-sharing through enhanced communication infrastructure, and (3) demonstrating commitment to long-term regional engagement. These three phases collectively demonstrate Indonesia’s systematic development of maritime capabilities and institutions, creating foundations for enhanced regional diplomatic influence and establishing what we term “geographic

arbitrage”—strategically exploiting its position between major maritime regions to extract benefits from multiple great powers while maintaining autonomy.

Maritime Diplomacy and Regional Leadership: Mechanisms, Implementation, and Outcomes

Indonesia’s material capability improvements were complemented by sophisticated diplomatic initiatives exemplifying middle power behavior—leveraging diplomatic networks and institutional frameworks to influence regional dynamics despite resource constraints relative to great powers. Indonesia formalized 89 bilateral maritime cooperation agreements (2014-2024)—a 167% increase from the previous decade, covering maritime security, fishery management, and environmental protection. Ministry of Foreign Affairs data indicates 76% achieved concrete implementation (joint patrols, information-sharing systems, capacity-building programs). This proliferation demonstrates what Yoshida and Prakoso (2024) term “network-based maritime governance”—developing interconnected bilateral relationships that collectively enhance regional stability absent comprehensive multilateral frameworks. However, we must distinguish between agreement quantity and quality. Our analysis reveals variation in implementation effectiveness: agreements with Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia achieved 89-94% implementation rates, while agreements with more distant partners showed 52-67% implementation. This suggests that geographic proximity, shared threat perceptions, and existing institutional relationships mediated agreement effectiveness.

Indonesia’s diplomatic initiatives created necessary conditions for cooperation, but successful implementation required partner commitment and complementary capabilities. Complementing bilateral diplomacy, Indonesia led creation of 15 regional maritime cooperation frameworks, notably the ASEAN Guidelines for Maritime Cooperation (2021) and Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Cooperation Initiative (2023), engaging 32 Indo-Pacific nations (ASEAN Secretariat Reports, 2024). These achievements exceeded prior projections—Ramadhan et al. (2023) predicted only 70-80% growth in cooperation projects. This acceleration exemplifies what Lee (2018) characterizes as “institutional entrepreneurship”—identifying governance gaps and creating institutional solutions. Indonesia demonstrated particular skill in recognizing regional maritime governance deficiencies and designing frameworks promoting stability while advancing national interests. Our process tracing reveals the causal mechanism: Indonesia identified specific coordination failures (e.g., lack of standardized maritime incident reporting) → convened regional consultations → negotiated framework provisions → secured ASEAN endorsement → facilitated implementation. Critical evidence includes diplomatic cables showing Indonesia’s strategic framing of proposals to address partners’ concerns while advancing Indonesian priorities. However, framework creation does not automatically produce governance improvements—implementation depends on sustained political will, resource allocation, and evolving threat landscapes. We assess that Indonesia’s institutional entrepreneurship contributed significantly to regional governance architecture, but framework effectiveness varies considerably. The ASEAN Maritime Forum achieved high participation (average 28 nations) and produced concrete outcomes (8 information-sharing centers), while other initiatives remained largely symbolic. This variation suggests that institutional entrepreneurship succeeds when addressing genuine coordination problems with support from key regional players, but faces limits when interests diverge or resources prove insufficient.

Beyond bilateral agreements and regional frameworks, Indonesia conducted 34 maritime boundary negotiations (2014-2024), successfully concluding agreements with 7 neighboring countries, and mediated 12 regional maritime disputes with 83% success rate in facilitating dialogue

(Maritime Affairs Ministry Strategic Review, 2024). This success rate significantly exceeded expectations—Riyanto and Mellyana (2024) predicted merely three to four boundary agreements. This achievement exemplifies what Ackert (2023) describes as “constructive neutrality”—maintaining credibility among rival parties while promoting practical solutions. Indonesia’s effectiveness in dispute resolution stems from perceived neutrality and vested interest in regional stability.

However, establishing causal attribution proves challenging. Our process tracing documents Indonesia’s specific contributions: convening disputant parties, proposing compromise solutions, providing technical expertise, and offering face-saving mechanisms. Diplomatic records show explicit acknowledgment of Indonesia’s mediating role. Yet we must recognize alternative explanations: some disputes may have become ripe for resolution due to changing power dynamics, economic incentives, or third-party pressures independent of Indonesian mediation. We conclude that Indonesia’s mediation contributed to but did not solely determine dispute resolution outcomes. The causal mechanism operated through: (1) providing neutral venues reducing bilateral tensions, (2) offering technical expertise facilitating compromise, and (3) leveraging regional standing to incentivize cooperation. Indonesian mediation was most effective when disputants had pre-existing willingness to compromise and when material stakes permitted negotiated solutions. These three dimensions of diplomatic engagement—bilateral cooperation, regional framework development, and dispute mediation—collectively position Indonesia as a sophisticated diplomatic actor capable of managing complex regional relationships while maintaining strategic autonomy.

Operational Cooperation, Capacity Building, and Translation of Policy to Practice

Indonesia’s regional leadership translated into concrete operational coordination and capacity-building initiatives transforming policy frameworks into tangible security improvements. Indonesia presided over 23 ASEAN maritime initiatives and hosted 45 regional maritime security conferences (average 28 participating nations), establishing 8 regional maritime information exchange centers (ASEAN Maritime Forum Records, 2024). This leadership position exemplifies what Ariadno (2021) terms “convening authority”—capacity to unite diverse actors addressing common maritime challenges. This influence transcends formal authority, embodying what Putri (2023) calls “soft maritime power”—ability to shape regional discourse through persuasion rather than coercion. Yet we must carefully assess whether Indonesia’s forum leadership produced substantive outcomes or merely symbolic participation. Our analysis distinguishes between convening success (measured by participation rates) and substantive success (measured by concrete cooperative activities). While Indonesia successfully attracted broad participation, translating this into operational cooperation varied considerably. The 8 information-sharing centers represent tangible achievements, yet their operational effectiveness depends on sustained funding and political support—factors beyond Indonesian control.

Joint maritime patrols increased from 24 annually (2014) to 87 (2023); multilateral maritime security exercises expanded from 6 to 19 annually. These operational engagements enhanced regional maritime security cooperation and response capabilities (Maritime Affairs Ministry Annual Report, 2024). This operational expansion represents what Erskine (2023) identifies as “practice-based regionalism”—advancing regional cooperation through concrete operational activity rather than abstract declarations. Ministry of Foreign Affairs records document Indonesia’s participation in 156 maritime-related international forums (2014-2024), compared to 67 in the previous decade, creating what Yoshida and Prakoso (2024) term “presence-based credibility”—influence stemming from consistent constructive engagement. However, establishing causality between increased operational

cooperation and enhanced regional security requires careful analysis. While joint patrols and exercises increased, regional maritime incidents (piracy, illegal fishing) show complex trends not straightforwardly attributable to Indonesian initiatives. ReCAAP data indicates piracy incidents in Southeast Asian waters declined 34% (2014-2023), but this trend correlates with multiple factors including improved enforcement by multiple nations, economic development reducing piracy incentives, and enhanced international naval presence. Our process tracing suggests Indonesian operational cooperation contributed to security improvements through: (1) information-sharing reducing response times, (2) coordinated patrols increasing enforcement coverage, and (3) capacity-building improving partner capabilities. Yet we cannot attribute regional security trends solely to Indonesian initiatives—they resulted from collective regional efforts where Indonesia played an important but not exclusive role.

Indonesia implemented 34 bilateral and 28 multilateral maritime capacity-building initiatives focusing on maritime domain awareness, law enforcement capabilities, and response mechanisms (BAKAMLA Operational Reports, 2024). This emphasis exemplifies what Niazi (2024) terms “capability transfer diplomacy”—strategic use of technical assistance to strengthen regional partners while enhancing influence. This strategy reflects classic middle power behavior—utilizing specialized expertise to enhance influence despite limited resources. Our assessment indicates that capacity-building initiatives generated goodwill and strengthened bilateral relationships, but translating training programs into sustained capability improvements in partner nations faced challenges including resource constraints, political instability, and competing priorities. Indonesian capacity-building proved most effective when integrated with sustained bilateral engagement and when recipients possessed institutional foundations for absorbing transferred capabilities. These operational initiatives and capacity-building programs demonstrate that Indonesian leadership extends beyond diplomatic forums to concrete security cooperation, creating tangible improvements in regional maritime governance while simultaneously enhancing Indonesia’s regional standing and credibility. The integration of operational cooperation with capacity-building represents sophisticated middle power strategy—creating visible improvements in regional security while building long-term partnerships and influence networks.

Theoretical Implications, Comparative Analysis, and Strategic Significance

The emergence of Indonesia’s enhanced regional role can be attributed to intersecting factors within the Indo-Pacific regional security complex that created conducive environments for middle power leadership. Intensified great power rivalry created opportunities for middle powers to enhance regional influence. Lee (2018) notes this fundamental alteration in regional power relations allowed Indonesia to leverage its geographic position and diplomatic capabilities more effectively than other ASEAN nations. Fluid regional power dynamics created unprecedented opportunities for middle powers to shape regional security architecture, supporting our initial theoretical framework concerning middle power roles in regional security complexes. Internal political consolidation during Jokowi’s administration enabled more coherent policy implementation than previous periods. Strong inter-agency collaboration, demonstrated by an 83% success rate in conflict resolution, signified improved institutional coherence—a critical factor Ackert (2023) identifies as vital for effective maritime governance. This internal consolidation established foundations for assertive regional leadership. Growing recognition of maritime security challenges—from illegal fishing to piracy and territorial disputes—generated demand for regional leadership that Indonesia strategically positioned itself to fulfill. Ariadno (2021) observes: “Indonesia’s readiness to confront common maritime challenges has positioned it as an essential ally in regional maritime security.”

Indonesia's GMF strategy demonstrates distinctive characteristics relative to comparable middle powers. Unlike Australia's alliance-based approach prioritizing security partnerships with the United States, Indonesia pursued strategic autonomy through diversified regional engagement. While both achieved enhanced regional influence, Australia's stemmed primarily from allied great power backing, whereas Indonesia's derived from perceived neutrality and institutional entrepreneurship. This supports our argument that maritime geography creates distinct strategic opportunities—Indonesia's archipelagic position enables it to position itself as regional connector, while Australia's peripheral location incentivizes great power alignment. Compared to South Korea's New Southern Policy emphasizing economic connectivity through infrastructure investment, Indonesia's GMF balanced economic and security dimensions more evenly. South Korea leveraged superior economic resources for infrastructure-led engagement, while Indonesia compensated for economic limitations through diplomatic innovation and institutional framework creation. Vietnam's maritime strategy, focused on sovereignty protection in South China Sea disputes with minimal mediator role, contrasts sharply with Indonesia's active dispute resolution (83% mediation success rate versus Vietnam's 0% as non-mediator). This difference reflects distinct strategic circumstances—Vietnam's direct territorial conflicts constrain its ability to play neutral mediator, while Indonesia's more secure territorial position enables constructive neutrality. These comparisons highlight how material security conditions shape middle power strategic options.

Table 2. Comparative Maritime Middle Power Strategies (2014-2024)

Source: Author-created. Based on comparative analysis of maritime strategies from Abbondanza (2022), Ackert (2023), Lee (2018), Ariadno (2021), and official government sources.

Dimension	Indonesia (GMF)	Australia (Indo-Pacific Endeavour)	South Korea (New Southern Policy)	Vietnam (Maritime Diplomacy)
Primary Strategic Focus	Regional leadership through institutional entrepreneurship	Security partnerships with traditional allies	Economic connectivity with maritime infrastructure	Sovereignty protection with selective engagement
Capability Investment	189% increase in maritime defense expenditure; emphasis on surveillance	Sustained high-level capabilities; focus on interoperability	Moderate increase; balanced fleet development	Constrained by resources; asymmetric capabilities
Diplomatic Approach	Multilateral framework creation (15 frameworks)	Bilateral alliances with multilateral supplements	Economic-led engagement (infrastructure investment)	Hedging with limited multilateral leadership
Regional Cooperation Success	89 bilateral agreements (76% implementation)	Strong security cooperation with select partners	Infrastructure-focused partnerships	Strategic partnerships with major powers
Dispute Resolution Role	Active mediation (83% success rate)	Limited mediation; security guarantor role	Minimal dispute resolution role	Party to disputes; limited mediator role

Institutional Innovation	High (AOIP, regional frameworks)	Moderate (Quad participation)	Moderate (ASEAN+3 engagement)	Low (follows ASEAN lead)
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Indonesia's maritime strategy provides substantial theoretical insights regarding middle power behavior in maritime domains, requiring refinement of existing middle power theory to account for maritime-specific dynamics. Indonesia's capability development and diplomatic initiatives exemplify Abbondanza's (2022) strategic autonomy concept—middle power ability to independently influence regional security frameworks. The successful establishment of 8 regional maritime information-sharing centers aligns with Erskine's (2022) "networked maritime governance" concept, demonstrating how institutional capacity-building enhances regional leadership credentials.

However, our findings suggest that maritime geography creates distinct autonomy challenges and opportunities not adequately captured in general middle power theory. Maritime middle powers face unique vulnerabilities (extensive coastlines, limited surveillance capabilities, dependence on sea lanes) but also unique opportunities (strategic chokepoint control, connector rather than buffer roles, maritime law normative frameworks). Indonesia leveraged these opportunities through what we term "geographic arbitrage"—strategically exploiting its position between major maritime regions to extract benefits from multiple great powers while maintaining autonomy. Our findings extend middle power theory by identifying conditions enabling adaptive behavior: (1) institutional stability facilitating policy coherence, (2) leadership continuity providing strategic direction, and (3) resource availability enabling sustained capability development. When these conditions obtained (2014-2020), Indonesia demonstrated high adaptability; when they weakened (2021-2023 amid shifting economic priorities), strategic coherence declined. This suggests a refinement to middle power theory: adaptive behavior is not inherent to middle power status but rather depends on domestic political and institutional conditions. Middle powers facing political instability, resource constraints, or competing domestic priorities struggle to maintain coherent regional strategies regardless of diplomatic skill.

While Indonesia achieved notable successes, our analysis also reveals systematic limits to middle power influence in maritime domains. Despite 234% improvement in maritime surveillance and 89 cooperation agreements, Indonesia could not prevent great power competition from intensifying in the South China Sea, could not compel disputant states to accept mediated solutions when core interests were engaged, and could not independently deter great power military activities in regional waters. These limits suggest that middle power influence operates primarily at the level of process rather than outcomes—Indonesia shaped how regional actors engaged maritime issues (through what forums, with what norms, using what procedures) but could not determine substantive outcomes when great power interests strongly diverged. This distinction between process influence and outcome determination represents an important theoretical refinement, suggesting middle power theory should focus analytical attention on procedural rather than substantive power.

Furthermore, our findings indicate that middle power maritime influence depends critically on great power restraint. Indonesia's mediator role succeeded when great powers tacitly accepted Indonesian facilitation; when great powers chose to bypass regional institutions or engage bilaterally, Indonesian influence diminished markedly. This suggests middle power influence is conditionally granted rather than inherently possessed—great powers tolerate middle power leadership when it serves their interests or when costs of direct engagement exceed benefits. The GMF experience enhances understanding of complex interactions among material capabilities, diplomatic initiatives,

and institutional frameworks in shaping regional maritime governance. Indonesia's decade-long implementation demonstrates that middle powers can achieve considerable regional influence through strategic coherence and targeted capability enhancement, providing a model for other regional actors seeking enhanced maritime influence in an increasingly complex and contested Indo-Pacific context. However, the sustainability of Indonesia's achievements remains uncertain. Leadership transitions, shifting great power dynamics, evolving regional threat landscapes, and domestic resource constraints could erode GMF accomplishments. The ultimate test of Indonesia's maritime strategy lies not in Jokowi-era achievements but in their institutionalization and adaptation under subsequent leadership amid changing regional conditions.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum strategy (2014-2024) to understand how middle powers navigate great power competition while pursuing regional leadership. Our decade-long analysis reveals substantial transformation from a domestic development initiative to a sophisticated diplomatic instrument for maintaining strategic autonomy and regional stability. We introduce "maritime middle power diplomacy"—the strategic use of geographic position, institutional entrepreneurship, and targeted capability-building to shape regional maritime governance while preserving autonomy from great power pressures. Three causal mechanisms link maritime capacity-building to regional influence: capability-credibility linkage (Indonesia's 234% surveillance improvement preceded increased mediation requests), institutional entrepreneurship (15 regional frameworks engaging 32 nations), and strategic hedging (89 diversified bilateral agreements). However, these mechanisms operate contingently—middle power influence depends critically on favorable structural conditions including great power restraint, regional demand for leadership, and domestic political stability. Indonesia's success stemmed from distinctive factors: archipelagic geography enabling connector roles, institutional innovation compensating for resource limitations, perceived neutrality facilitating mediation credibility, and balanced attention to security-economic dimensions. The GMF model proves most transferable when four conditions obtain: geographic advantage, institutional capacity, regional receptivity with governance gaps, and great power tolerance. For Indonesia, sustainability requires institutionalizing GMF priorities through permanent bureaucratic structures, enhancing maritime domain awareness through standardized protocols, integrating infrastructure development with strategic objectives, and refining hedging strategies while strengthening ASEAN solidarity. Our findings advance middle power theory by identifying maritime-specific dynamics inadequately captured in existing frameworks, demonstrating that middle powers can significantly shape regional security frameworks through strategic coherence and sustained engagement, yet this influence operates within structural constraints. The ultimate lesson: geography and resources matter, but strategic vision and consistent execution can convert limitations into opportunities—provided favorable structural conditions obtain and adversaries tolerate middle power leadership roles.

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