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Indonesia's Maritime Ambition: Can Jokowi Realise It? (Corrected Version)

By Prashanth Parameswaran

Synopsis

To realise his vision of a 'global maritime fulcrum', Indonesian president Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo needs to solve the tricky problem of coordinating Indonesia's sprawling maritime security domain. He will need to overcome several challenges to make a lasting impact. (This version corrects the budget figures in paragraphs 12 and 13).

Commentary

INDONESIAN PRESIDENT Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's vision for Indonesia as a 'global maritime fulcrum' (*poros maritim dunia*) between the Pacific and Indian Oceans has attracted significant interest internationally. Yet the success of this ambitious maritime doctrine will depend largely on whether the country can get its act together on basic tasks such as coordinating the security of one of the world's longest coastlines.

While Jokowi has made some initial efforts at addressing Indonesia's maritime coordination problem, he faces several formidable challenges ahead. To begin with, he has to manage no fewer than 12 national agencies or 'stakeholders' related to maritime security affairs.

The context

Indonesia, by one count, is the world's largest archipelagic state with more than 18,000 islands and nearly eight million square kilometres of sea area. To manage this sprawling archipelagic nation, there are 12 national agencies responsible for maritime security affairs include the navy, the national police, the transportation ministry and the maritime affairs and fisheries ministry.

In theory, their responsibilities are divided both functionally and geographically so as to avoid any overlap. In reality, this has been a logistical nightmare, with various agencies competing for authority and resources. In addition to being ineffective, this is also prohibitively expensive. Siswanto Rusdi, the director of the National Maritime Institute, has written that estimates of the cost to the shipping industry run as high as seven trillion rupiah (US\$539 million) per year.

Though this has long been recognised as a problem, previous efforts to resolve it have proven ineffective. In 2005, Indonesia began setting up the Maritime Security Coordinating Board (Badan Kordinasi Keamanan Laut, BAKORKAMLA) to streamline maritime security between these various

agencies. However, despite its best efforts with a limited mandate, entrenched interests prevailed and it was subsequently dismissed by some as toothless. In 2008, a new law mandated the establishment of an Indonesian Sea and Coast Guard. But that idea was never really fully implemented amid fierce turf wars.

Jokowi's early efforts

Jokowi had indicated in his election campaign that he would make maritime security a key priority as president and that he was committed to realising his 'global maritime fulcrum' vision. It was clear to both him and his top advisers early on that to realise the key priorities under that vision, he would need to begin fixing Indonesia's maritime coordination problem. The key priorities include securing Indonesia's resources by curbing illegal fishing, building up the country's maritime defences and preserving Indonesia's territorial integrity.

On Archipelago Day (Hari Nusantara) on 13 December 2014, Jokowi took an important step by setting up a new Maritime Security Agency (Badan Keamanan Laut, BAKAMLA) under the Coordinating Ministry of Political, Security and Legal Affairs to replace BAKORKAMLA. Beyond the name change, the idea was to grant BAKAMLA greater command authority to coordinate and deploy the assets of Indonesia's government agencies – rather than just share information like its weaker predecessor.

BAKAMLA will also be equipped with a much larger staff and fleet to create what some have described as the equivalent of a coast guard. His administration has also since enlisted BAKAMLA to curb illegal fishing, using the area as a benchmark to see how the agency fares before it undertakes greater tasks further down the line.

Road ahead

Despite this encouraging start, the Jokowi administration will have to take several steps to ensure BAKAMLA's success. Firstly, it should vest it with firm and clear authority. Jokowi has already issued a presidential regulation to create the body last year; it is already involved in the illegal fishing task force established in December. But the real boost for the agency will come when he issues a more comprehensive government regulation, which his predecessor Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was unable to do on related issues.

Doing so would both empower the group as well as specify and clarify its roles relative to other institutions which are critical to streamlining maritime security. The Office of the Coordinating Political, Legal and Security Affairs is reportedly already preparing this, and the expectation is that it will be unveiled soon.

Secondly, it should ensure that BAKAMLA is adequately resourced to fulfill its responsibilities, which include conducting exercises and patrols. This means increasing its funding as well as equipping it with vessels and personnel. BAKAMLA initially started off with only three patrol boats and being allocated a 520 billion rupiah (US\$40 million) budget for the year, which is rather paltry considering its responsibilities. "We totally don't have enough resources," BAKAMLA's operational management head, Colonel Andi Achdar recently admitted, rather candidly.

On 13 February the Indonesian House of Representatives approved an additional 726.3 billion rupiah (US\$56 million) in funding for BAKAMLA to be reflected in the 2015 budget. And in early February, BAKAMLA's Deputy of Operations and Training Commodore Wuspo Lukito said that it would be receiving 30 domestically-produced patrol boats and that some agencies would be donating vessels. But much more is needed if BAKAMLA is to emerge as a capable agency with a strength of 2,000 personnel.

Thirdly, Jokowi and his advisers must work toward incremental targets for enhanced coordination, with the eventual goal of BAKAMLA not only carrying out operations, but also becoming the hub for integrating command information and communication systems as well as maritime investigation processes.

Upon its establishment, cabinet secretary Andi Widjajanto had said that this so-called "new era of

synergistic maritime security operation” would be supported by an early warning system as well as an integrated law enforcement unit. In reality, this ‘new era’ is very much a work in progress. Wuspo, the operating chief, has openly acknowledged that synergising efforts with other maritime stakeholders has been a struggle and that it “takes time” to get past the “silo mentality” of other agencies.

In Jokowi’s inaugural address to the national legislature in Jakarta last October, he invoked the Sanskrit slogan “*Jalesveva Jayamah*” (in the ocean we triumph). To achieve that victory, he must ensure that he first wins the critical battle to solve Indonesia’s maritime coordination dilemma.

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