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Indonesia's National Sea Policy: Concretising the Global Maritime Fulcrum

By Keoni Marzuki

Synopsis

A presidential regulation on Indonesia's National Sea Policy recently issued by President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) incorporates the Global Maritime Fulcrum and outlines a number of strategies to fulfil Indonesia's maritime aspiration.

Commentary

PRESIDENT JOKO 'Jokowi' Widodo recently signed a Presidential Regulation No. 16/2017 on Indonesia's National Sea Policy. It incorporates the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) vision in a formal and authoritative regulatory umbrella and provides a clearer picture of the shape of President Widodo's maritime aspiration.

In addition, the new regulation outlines an action plan that comprises programmes, strategies and desired outputs seen as crucial in realising GMF's progress. The regulation also functions as a reference for the public and private sector to contribute in developing the maritime sector.

More Bite for Global Maritime Fulcrum

The long-awaited Sea Policy partially answers lingering questions on the GMF, whether it is simply an election rhetoric designed to offset President Widodo's lack of profound interest in foreign policy or a genuine aspiration to take advantage of Indonesia's geo-strategic strengths.

Despite the delay of more than two years, during which he restructured his cabinet by appointing a coordinating minister to oversee maritime affairs, the regulatory framework signals his seriousness to pursue Indonesia's maritime aspiration.

President Widodo's use of the East Asia Summit in 2014 which he hosted to internationalise GMF further underscored this endeavour.

This new framework is indeed an important first step in fulfilling the GMF vision as it delineates various aspects critical to policy implementation. Despite this regulatory umbrella, it is commonly argued that policy implementation in Indonesia is always problematic because of the executive body's inconsistencies in implementing policy. Whether the policy truly serves as an anchor for future policy implementations regarding Indonesia's maritime aspiration or not remains to be seen.

Some aspects of the regulatory framework do not differ significantly from the National Maritime Policy White Paper draft that was circulated through social media and websites last year. However, the Presidential Regulation clearly shows that new aspects not elaborated in the draft White Paper (e.g. policy targets, concrete programmes, related stakeholders responsible for the programmes, etc.) has been added into the regulation.

Key Aspects of New Policy

There are two integral parts to the policy. The first is the main Document on Indonesia's National Sea Policy, which serves as an authoritative reference point for the implementation of maritime policy. It outlines a number of important aspects including Indonesia's sovereign rights in the maritime domain; challenges in fulfilling its grand maritime aspiration; and the objectives and underlying principles of the Sea Policy.

The policy rests on seven pillars – an expansion of GMF's original five pillars. They are (i) management of maritime resources and human resources development; (ii) maritime defence, security, law enforcement and safety at sea; (iii) maritime governance; (iv) maritime economy, infrastructure and welfare improvement; (v) maritime spatial management and environmental protection; (vi) nautical culture; and (vii) maritime diplomacy.

The second part of the regulatory framework is Indonesia's Sea Policy Action Plan. Essentially, the Action Plan translates the seven pillars into policy programmes, complete with a detailed outline of policy priorities, strategies, aims and objectives. It sets out the ministries and institutions responsible for programme implementation, relevant institutions and stakeholders, the timeframe and funding sources.

It was formulated with the particular aim of synchronising programme implementation by the various stakeholders. It comprises five main clusters of policy priorities, namely (i) maritime boundaries, maritime space and maritime diplomacy; (ii) maritime industries and connectivity; (iii) natural resources industry and maritime service, as well as management of marine environment; (iv) maritime defence and security, and; (v) nautical culture, with a total of 24 policy priorities and dozens of programmes across these clusters. Majority of these programmes however, are pre-existing ones initiated even before the Widodo administration.

The Presidential Regulation mandated the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs as the lead ministry to coordinate policy implementation, oversight and evaluation of

the Maritime Policy, while the duty to execute the action plan is in the hands of relevant ministries and state institutions.

The coordinating ministry is also responsible for coordination with other coordinating ministries, so as to produce an integrated evaluation report to recalibrate future maritime policies. Its two primary roles as highlighted by the regulation would also mean expanding the pool of human resources with various backgrounds, expertise and skills, ranging from economics, engineering and development; as well as defence and education.

Concretising the Global Maritime Fulcrum

Prior to the Presidential Regulation, there is very little of substance and structure to the GMF, aside from the initial five pillars outlined by President Widodo, rendering attempts to understand the nebulous vision difficult.

The new regulatory framework and its two main components add more substance to the broader GMF vision by outlining underlying essentials, such as broad objectives, principles and pillars of Maritime Policy, as well as designating the agendas and programmes necessary to accelerate the implementation of GMF.

Apart from fleshing out the GMF, the new regulatory framework provides a better guide and structure in the policy implementation phases. Its strong attention to details, demonstrated by outlining specific year-on-year goals of each policy programmes and the identifying of specific ministries and interrelated stakeholders to execute numerous policy programmes, is a commendable effort to disentangle the complex coordination and oversight process.

That said, the Presidential Regulation only provides the skeletal structure and vital components of GMF. Ministries, state institutions, and local governments most likely will develop plans at the technical level based on this regulation to complete their own targets, considering that certain targets are defined broadly. They may also formulate supplementary programmes, upon consultation with the relevant authorities, to plug any potential gaps in the Action Plan.

First Step Towards Fulfilling Maritime Aspiration

Both of these derivatives and supplementary programmes will certainly add more layers to the Sea Policy and thus expanding it further. As such, the Presidential Regulation should be treated as the first step or phase towards fulfilling Indonesia's maritime aspiration.

The initial timeframe for the action plan stretches until 2019, in step with the presidential elections, while subsequent action plans will be applicable for five years, under separate Presidential Regulations. The evaluative and recalibration elements built into the law indicate that Indonesia's Sea Policy, and by extension the GMF, is flexible as it exists as a continuum.

Thus while the policy provides an understanding of GMF's underlying fundamentals as well as policy targets required to fulfil the vision, it is but a part, albeit an important

and a broad one, of the GMF. As policy priorities shift and circumstances change in the future, it is likely for Indonesia's maritime policy focus to change accordingly as well.

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