



THE EMERGENCE OF INDONESIA'S OCEAN POLICY

BY DEWI FORTUNA ANWAR

Dewi Fortuna Anwar (isfdewi@ntu.edu.sg) is Distinguished Visiting Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. This article was originally published in RSIS Commentary and can be found [here](#).

The Indonesian equivalent for the word “Motherland” is “*Tanah Air*” or literally “Land-Water”. This signifies that the islands and waters comprising the *Nusantara* – the Indonesian archipelago – make up one unified and inseparable entity. Starting from the Djuanda Declaration of 1957 which enunciated Indonesia’s “*Wawasan Nusantara*” or Archipelagic Outlook, Indonesia took a leading role in the international acceptance of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982 which recognizes Indonesia’s status as an archipelagic state.

Nevertheless, throughout most of the New Order period (1966-1998) the Indonesian government paid scant attention to the country’s maritime development. The priorities of the Suharto government were predominantly land-based and focused on the densely populated islands in the western part of Indonesia. While the limited financial resources to develop a strong navy and other maritime capacity was a major constraint, the real impediment to the realisation of *Wawasan Nusantara* was the army’s then stranglehold on politics.

Streamlining Indonesian Ocean Law

The call for greater attention to Indonesia’s maritime domain had started during the New Order period, but it only found traction after the fall of President Suharto in 1998. Successive Indonesian governments since the onset of *reformasi* have begun to give more attention to Indonesia’s archipelagic nature with its specific weaknesses and potentials.

Strengthening the Indonesian navy, ensuring better control over Indonesia’s outermost islands, finalising maritime boundaries, improving law enforcement at sea to ensure the security and safety of navigation, husbanding the country’s rich marine resources and improving sea transportation to reduce the isolation of the eastern islands have all become national priorities.

One of the problems faced by Indonesia over its maritime domain was that for a long time there was no single comprehensive ocean regulation. There were over a dozen laws which gave different ministries and agencies particular responsibilities at sea. Development activities were scattered over various central government ministries and agencies to the different levels of regional administrations without a clear roadmap, leading to disappointing results and inefficiency.

Institutional competitions were particular hazards to law enforcement at sea. The seriousness of the situation led to increasing calls for a more integrated policy on managing Indonesia’s seas.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono established a consultative body, the “*Dewan Kelautan Indonesia*” (Indonesian Maritime Council), in 2007 to help formulate a general policy on ocean affairs. President Yudhoyono signed the seminal Law Number 32 of 2014 on Ocean Affairs on 17 October 2014, just a few days before he stepped down. The move brought together salient elements scattered in different legislations pertaining to the management and development of Indonesia’s maritime domain under one law.

Law Number 32/2014 became the legal basis for the establishment of the “*Badan Keamanan Laut*” (Maritime Security Board), a full-fledged agency responsible for ensuring security, safety and law enforcement at sea with a stronger mandate than the coordinating agency for security at sea “*BAKORKAMLA*” that it replaced.

Indonesia as a “Global Maritime Fulcrum”

While all the post-1998 presidents had given greater attention towards Indonesia’s maritime domain, it is President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) who has elevated maritime-related affairs to a national priority. Strengthening Indonesia’s maritime identity was one of the campaign pledges put forward by President Jokowi, which he followed up with the plan to make Indonesia a “Global Maritime Fulcrum” (GMF) soon after being sworn in as president on 20 October 2014.

Jokowi created the new Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs, which coordinates the Ministry for Maritime Affairs and Fishery, the Ministry of

Transportation, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources as well as the Ministry of Tourism, reflecting its economic thrust.

On 20 February 2017 Jokowi signed Presidential Decree Number 16 of 2017 concerning Indonesian Ocean Policy (IOP) which will be the primary reference point for all programmes and activities related to Indonesia's maritime domain. The goal of the IOP is to realise the GMF Vision of "Indonesia as a sovereign, advanced, independent, strong maritime nation that is able to provide positive contribution for peace and security in the region as well as to the world".

The roadmap of the IOP highlights seven policy pillars: Marine and Human Resources Development; Maritime Security, Law Enforcement and Safety at Sea; Ocean Governance and Institutions; Development of Maritime Economy; Ocean Space Management and Marine Protection; Maritime Culture; and Maritime Diplomacy. Each of the policy pillars is further broken down into policies/strategies, altogether totalling 76 policies/strategies.

The first Plan of Action is for the period 2016-2019 which highlights five priority clusters: Maritime Boundary, Ocean Space and Maritime Diplomacy; Maritime Industry and Sea Connectivity; Services and Industry of Marine Natural Resources and Marine Environment Management; Maritime Defence and Security; and Maritime Culture

The implementation of the IOP is carried out by the ministries and non-ministerial government agencies according to their respective roles and functions under the supervision of the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs.

Indonesia as Promoter of World Peace

It can be seen that the IOP is primarily domestically-oriented as most of the policy pillars and strategies are aimed at strengthening the protection and management of the Indonesian archipelago, and maximising the economic potentials that its maritime domain has to offer as part of Indonesia's overall economic development. The external dimensions of the IOP are limited to maritime diplomacy and to defence and security.

Nevertheless, the GMF vision also underlines Indonesia's view of itself as an international promoter of peace. One of the IOP programmes on defence and security is to enhance Indonesia's participation in regional and international cooperation on maritime defence and security. On maritime diplomacy the IOP explicitly states that Indonesia must play a leadership role in various maritime cooperation and initiatives at the regional and multilateral levels.

The IOP, moreover, also states that the GMF vision should take into account of, and be synergised with, the

various regional initiatives as long as they are in line with Indonesia's national interests and can make positive contributions to peace.

PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged. Click [here](#) to request a PacNet subscription.