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Is Indonesia a Rising Assertive Maritime Power?

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Abstract

Indonesia, an archipelagic and maritime state, has been actively demonstrating its leadership role based on its principles of independent and active foreign policy. Despite investing heavily in its role as a bridge builder, Indonesia has received criticism for the perceived lack of impact. This study aims to scrutinize the effectiveness of utilizing Indonesian maritime resources to fulfill its leadership role in both regional and global security landscapes. It seeks to identify the strategies and policies devised by Indonesia to integrate its maritime strength into its leadership initiatives, evaluate their implementation, and explore avenues through which Indonesia can maximize its maritime resources to evolve into a more assertive maritime power. This study employs neo-realist perspectives and qualitative research methods to analyze strategic environment faced by Indonesia. It argues that although Indonesia has utilized its maritime resources, it has not effectively maximized nor consistently implemented them. This study suggests the importance of continually enriching the discourse on maritime power within Indonesian society and fostering collaboration among defense and foreign policy actors. This study can contribute to academic discussions by exploring how Indonesia can optimize its maritime power to effectively fulfill its leadership role and execute its independent and active foreign policy.

Keywords:

maritime power; independent and active; Indonesian foreign and defense policy; assertive; regional and global security.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, an archipelago, has the potential to be a maritime power as it has geostrategic location and abundant maritime resources. Approximately 77 percent of Indonesia's total area is the sea, which amounts to 6.4 million square metres and Indonesia's potential wealth of the sea reaches Rp. 1,772 trillion (Kemenko PMK, 2023). With the vastness of the sea and the wealth of maritime resources and good leadership, Indonesian in the past, during the Majapahit and Srijiwaya Kingdoms had an influence in Southeast Asia. Coastal civilization and the history of maritime diplomacy were demonstrated in Java, which is located in the middle of the archipelago. Java shapes coastal civilization in Southeast Asia through cultural contacts, wars, religious spread and maritime trading networks (Susilowati, 2018).

However, the strength of Indonesia's maritime resources and maritime culture are overlooked. Yet, the management of maritime domain could benefit from a collaborative approach between the state and civil society (Prasetya, 2017). The national defense system also still focuses on continental based defense when it should have adopted a maritime based defense (Indrawan, 2015).

Studies have discussed the importance of Indonesia's emphasis on sea power. Many studies also support the importance of Indonesia's maritime power after President Joko Widodo introduced Global Maritime Fulcrum in 2014. However, there is no literature that links the effectiveness of utilizing maritime resources to Indonesia's international leadership role.

This study aims to scrutinize the effectiveness of utilizing Indonesian maritime resources to fulfill its international leadership role. It can have an impact on the relevance of Indonesian independent and active foreign policy. This will be accomplished by addressing three research questions. First, what strategies and policies has Indonesia developed to integrate maritime power into its leadership role? Second, how effectively have these strategies and policies been implemented? Third, how can Indonesian utilize its maritime resources and become an assertive maritime power.

To answer the questions, the first section identifies Indonesia's strategies and policies for integrating its maritime strength into leadership initiatives. The second part assess the implementation and the last section investigates ways for Indonesia to optimize its maritime resources and become a more assertive maritime power.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, neo-realist perspectives are employed to analyze strategic environment faced by Indonesia. According to this viewpoint, states should seek power because the international system is anarchic. The state will seek to become more powerful than another state in the system. However, in the international system there are at least three different types of state: great power, middle power, and small power.

In regards to maritime power, sea power is the major element of it. The creation of sea power can be pursued by the state through the establishment of six sea power. According to Alfred Tayer Mahan (1890) in "*The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*," the elements that can form the basis of a country's maritime strategy are geographical position, land and coastal shape, the area, number of people who go to sea, character of the population, and the character of the government including national institutions. The integration of these six elements can facilitate a state to become the world maritime class element (Anugerah, 2022). According to *Maritime Power Competitiveness* (MPC) Index, Indonesia was classified as a World Class Sea Power between 2008 and 2017. Nonetheless, Indonesia's marine power modernisation has lagged behind that of other countries (Chairil et al., 2022).

To assess the implementation of Indonesia's strategies and policies, this study adopts the state level of analysis to include state strength and state structure.

To optimize maritime resources and become a more assertive maritime power this study adopts the concept of continuum of power by Joseph Nye. The concept elaborates soft power and hard power.

This analytical framework could provide a systematic methodology in scrutinizing the effectiveness Indonesian maritime resources to fulfill its international leadership role.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative methods, predominantly drawing from literature reviews and pertinent documents on Indonesian maritime strategies and policies. The examination of scholarly works and relevant materials have been the subject of this study. The study generates insightful analysis of the topic.

DISCUSSION

First Section

The integration of maritime into Indonesian Defense and Security Strategics and Policies

This section identifies the strategies and policies devised by Indonesia to integrate its maritime strength into its leadership initiatives. What are strategies and policies that has been formulated by Indonesia to integrate its maritime power in implementing its leadership role?

Indonesia has acknowledged the importance of geostrategic location, particularly Indonesia's maritime strength, since the administration of the first Indonesian President, Sukarno. On September 23, 1963, President Sukarno held the first Maritime Conference in Jakarta. In this national-level discussion, maritime stakeholders were gathered to make suggestions for the future of Indonesia's maritime development. At the occasion, Presiden Sukarno was honored as the Republic of Indonesia's Great Helmsman. President Sukarno was regarded as a leader who was capable of continuing Sriwijaya and Majapahit's maritime legacy. He was also considered the President who can lead a large ship of Indonesian archieplago with a maritime character. This historical event is today commemorated as National Maritime Day, which was established by Presidential Decree Number 249/1964 (News, 2017).

During his time as president, President Sukarno envisioned Indonesia as the world's lighthouse, with a focus on maritime sectors for development. This is stated in his speech as follows:

“...that to build Indonesia into a great country, a strong country, a prosperous country, a peaceful country, we must have the soul of an oceanic cakrawati; a

sailor's soul who dares to navigate the waves and waves that rool.." (President Sukarno, the Republic of Indonesia's Great Helmsman) (News, 2017).

During President Sukarno's administration, Indonesia obtained an additional water territory of around 3 million square kilometers through diplomatic efforts led by Prime Minister Djoeanda on December 13, 1957. The territorial waters were first declared international waterways that connected the territories that comprised the Republic of Indonesia. President Sukarno's leadership was maritime in nature, as evidenced, for example by Presidential Regulation Number 19 of 1960, dated August 30, 1960, which established the Maritime Council. President Sukarno also established a Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs to oversee the responsibilities of the Ministers of Transportation, Fisheries and Ocean Processing, and Industry (Marsetio, 2019).

However, over the next 32 years of President Soeharto's tenure, the Indonesian government prioritized land over maritime. The Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs was dismissed, forcing the government to concentrate on land rather than the sea for 32 years. After Soeharto stepped down and BJ Habibie became President, he published the Ocean Charter, which articulated a vision for Indonesia's ocean-oriented growth. The Charter includes Indonesia's maritime doctrine, which states that the country must "live from and with the sea" (Marsetio, 2019).

The following administration, led by President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), demonstrated a commitment to maritime development. President Gus Dur established the Department of Ocean Exploration on October 26, 1999, and later renamed it the Department of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, also known as the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. Under President Gus Dur's administration, the government formed the Indonesian Maritime Council by Presidential Decree Number 161 of 1999, which coordinates and synergizes Indonesia's maritime development. Beginning in 1999, the President designated December 13 as Nusantara Day. President Megawati continued Gus Dur's agenda of maritime development. President Megawati issues a "Sunda Kelapa Plea" to all components of the nation to reconstruct Indonesian maritime concept. In February 2004, the vision and objective of maritime Indonesia from a political perspective was formulated (Marsetio, 2019).

The following administration, led by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) for two terms from 2004 to 2014 prioritize the development of the non-maritime sector. Nonetheless, maritime development was included in the National Long-Term Development Plan from 2005 to 2025. Presiden SBY replaced Dewan Maritime Indonesia (The Indonesian Maritime Council) with Dewan Kelautan Indonesia (Indonesian Sea Council). The government held the World Ocean Conference in Manado in May 2009. President SBY enacted Law No. 27/2007 which governs the management of coastal areas and small islands in Indonesia. In addition, the President issued Presidential Instruction No. 5/2005 to empower the national Shipping industry (Marsetio, 2019).

The objective of transforming Indonesia into a global maritime power emerged in President Joko Widodo's administration goal of the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF). This vision aligns with Mahan's Sea Power Strategy (Pudjiastuti et al., 2021). President Joko Widodo introduced the GMF vision during his speech at the East Asia Summit on November 13, 2014. The GMF Vision has five main pillars, as follows (setkab.go.id, 2014):

1. Rebuilding Indonesia's maritime culture
2. Commit to safeguarding and managing maritime resources with a focus on building marine food sovereignty through the development of the fishing industry by placing fishermen as the main pillar
3. Commitment to encourage the development of maritime infrastructure and connectivity by building sea tolls, seaports, logistics, and shipping industries, as well as maritime tourism.
4. Conducting Maritime Diplomacy, inviting all Indonesian partners to engage in the maritime sector
5. Establishing a Maritime Defense Force

The GMF Vision, which emerged from geostrategic situations and historical factors, has an impact on Indonesia's strategy for achieving national goals. The concept of GMF is further outlined in Presidential Regulation No. 16/2017 on Indonesian Maritime Policy, Article 1, Paragraph 2.

The GMF is Indonesia's aspiration for becoming a maritime nation that is sovereign, advanced, independent, strong, and capable of contributing positively to regional and global security and peace while also serving national interests.

The vision of GMF is formulated in 7 policy pillars, as follows:(Bidang Kemaritiman RI, 2017):

1. The first pillar focuses on marine resource management and human resource development
2. The second pillar focuses on military, security, law enforcement, and maritime safety
3. The third pillar focuses on marine governance and institutions
4. The fourth pillar focuses on the economy, marine infrastructure, and welfare improvement
5. The fifth pillar focuses on managing and protecting marine space and ecology
6. The sixth pillar focuses maritime culture
7. The seventh pillar focuses on maritime diplomacy

This GMF vision could represent an adequate Indonesian policy response to geopolitical rivalry and existing threat dynamic (Perwita, 2020). Indonesian employees this vision as a middle-power strategy in response to the great power rivalry (Pratiwi et al., 2021).

Indonesia's maritime diplomacy, which is one of the supporting pillars of the GMF vision, has been praised for its success in defending national interest. Indonesia's maritime diplomacy has successfully carried out Indonesia's maritime boundary agreements with several countries in determining the boundaries of the territorial sea, Exclusive Economic Zone, and Continental Shelf in accordance with the rules of the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Kusumawardhani & Arie Afriansyah, 2019). Although the maritime diplomacy priorities established since the GMF vision's inception in 2014 can serve as a foundation and benchmarking for maritime diplomacy, Indonesia's maritime diplomacy accomplishments have yet to be fully realized as of 2019 (Hadiningrat, 2020).

Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum vision, as well as subsequent measures such as engaging in defense diplomacy with other governments, indicate considerable

attempts to include Indonesia's maritime power, which could potentially fulfill Indonesia's leadership capacity in its external environment. The vision is not only about connecting islands in Indonesia but also a projection for Indonesia to engage more in the region.

The Second Section

The Implementation of Indonesian Maritime Strategy and Policy

Based on the description of strategies and policies discussed in the first section, Indonesia has outlined strategies and policies to integrate maritime power. However, have these strategies and policies been effectively implemented?

The implementation of GMF must be examined from two viewpoints, as GMF has two sides: domestic and external. After President Joko Widodo presented the GMF in 2014, there was skepticism about the vision's implementation, which was considered overly ambitious. Potential issues are primarily internal, such as an under-equipped and under-resourced navy, financial resources for maritime defense, technical expertise in maritime industries, including dedicated modern research centers, and national political support (Shekhar & Liow, 2015). Two years after the GMF vision was launched, it appears like it is fading away. The Indonesian Navy also continues to dominate maritime governance, while the GMF vision emphasizes the importance of collaboration among all stakeholders.

GMF's vision, which is critical to the development of Indonesia's maritime power, has not been reflected in many national strategies or policies during Jokowi's second term. According to actor-specific theory, the decline in the quality of GMF implementation was driven by President Jokowi's idiosyncratic approaches to foreign policy formulation. As a result, decision-making, infrastructure development, and maritime diplomacy are less comprehensive (Agastia, 2021).

The implementation of the GMF vision is unconnected to BRI, which may have a principle linkage. The implementation of GMF was not entirely successful since it was executed from the top down, preventing society from being involved, and there was no concerted effort to integrate GMF into national building (Lalisang & Candra, 2020).

However, the GMF vision from an external perspective is crucial for Indonesia's leadership role. The GMF vision is considered to have inspired the Joko Widodo

administration to promote the concept of a peaceful, prosperous, and inclusive region. This concept is then incorporated into the ASEAN Outlook of Indo-Pacific plan in which ASEAN assumes a major role in collective leadership (Lecea & Zozaya, 2022).

The Indonesian government has not effectively maximized nor consistently implemented the strategies and policies. The decline in program intensity as a manifestation of GMF's vision is unfortunate, even though the vision is consistent with achieving Indonesia's national interests abroad through foreign policy and diplomacy.

The Third Section

The Evolution into an Assertive Maritime Power

Given this ineffectiveness of Indonesian maritime strategies and policies, this section considers ways for Indonesia to optimize its maritime resources. How can Indonesia maximize its maritime resources and turn into an assertive maritime power?

There are two major avenues; domestic and external sides.

First, we need to reposition ourselves as an assertive power than just middle power. Assertive power is not synonymous with aggressive power, nor it is limited to any one country's ability to adapt to changing circumstances. However, assertive power is a country that is confident in enhancing its national interests without having to be aggressive or risk alienating other countries. Assertive power necessitates collaboration among home actors who support foreign strategy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not been the only actor in charge of foreign policy and diplomacy particularly on maritime issues. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs serves as a gateway or facilitator for several ministries to collaborate in the struggle for foreign policy. Indonesia can foster collaboration among defense and foreign policy actors to bolster the maritime sector.

Indonesia has the capacity to maximize its maritime resources by constantly improving the discourse on maritime power in Indonesian culture. One way to increase maritime awareness, to introduce maritime culture and educate Generation X Millennials and Generation Z is to use social media. The rise of digital technology and the growing number of internet users in Indonesia will have an impact on the further development of maritime culture among Indonesian society (Isamuddin et al., 2021).

Second, we need to conduct maritime defense diplomacy and lead strategic maritime defense cooperation initiatives. Both of these initiatives must be implemented based on the principle of independent and active foreign policy.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia has a lot of maritime potential, but we haven't been able to optimize and effectively use Indonesian maritime resources to fulfill our leadership role internationally. The Indonesian government has not effectively maximized nor consistently implemented the strategies and policies. GMF can be seen as its soft and hard maritime power.

Indonesia should quit drifting aimlessly in international affairs, Indonesia should not be overly preoccupied in international relations events. Instead, Indonesia should be more explicit and assertive in its efforts to globalize its ideas and culture related to our own strength, maritime sectors.

Indonesia should not be a middle power that will never rise, but rather should exhibit its capacity with greater confidence by managing its position as an assertive power. Indonesia's development from a middle power to an aggressive maritime power takes time, much like the cycle of a butterfly that can finally take off to fly freely in the nature. Indonesia's efforts to adopt the concept of assertive maritime power must go through several stages, from egg to caterpillar to coon to butterfly. The stage starts with grounding ideas, then moves on to developing ideas and lastly executing ideas. That way, Indonesia is slowly to rise as an a rising assertive maritime power. ***

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