

# Jokowi's Maritime Axis: Change and Continuity of Indonesia's Role in Indo-Pacific

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## **Abstract**

*Indonesia is undergoing transition and soon, a new president will be inaugurated. The new president brings promises of new foreign and defence policy for Indonesia, building upon Indonesia's prior principles and putting renewed consideration on Indonesia's geopolitical position in the Indo-Pacific. This paper examines the "maritime axis", the concept coined by President Joko Widodo and the possible changes in Indonesian foreign and defence policy required as to achieve the maritime axis. In foreign policy, Indonesia is expected to contribute more to the Indian Ocean Rim Association while maintaining its ASEAN centrality. In defence, there is a significant change in Indonesia's defence outlook from land-based to maritime-based. Also, Indonesia looks towards India as a security partner in securing the Indian Ocean.*

Keywords: Strategic environment, security community, maritime axis, foreign policy, defence policy.

## **Introduction**

During the third presidential debate on 22 June 2014, presidential candidate Joko Widodo, or commonly recognized as "Jokowi", promoted the idea of Indonesia being a "maritime axis" in Southeast Asia. Being a "maritime axis", based on Joko Widodo's policy platform on defence and foreign policy submitted to the General Elections Commission (KPU), would secure Indonesia's economic and security interests in the maritime sector while also boosting Indonesia's identity as a maritime power and archipelagic nation. Following his inauguration in October 2014, Jokowi now has the opportunity to fulfil his ambitions of Indonesia being a global maritime axis.

Changes to Indonesia's foreign and defence policy to achieve Jokowi's ambitious

"maritime axis" are inevitable. Thus, this article aims to examine the possible changes and continuities to Indonesian foreign and defence policy in relation to the addition of the "maritime axis". These include a change in multilateral engagement through the addition of the Indian Ocean Rim as a location of interest and in Indonesia's defence outlook. However, while changes will be present, the sacrosanct principles of Indonesia's "free and active" foreign policy will remain the same.

This article first provides a review on the strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific. It notes the changing strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific, with the involvement of great powers and the emergence of the Indian Ocean as a new geopolitical interest. Then, we examine the "maritime axis" doctrine and the changes that it would bring to Indonesia's foreign and defence policy.

### The Changing Regional Strategic Environment of the Indo-Pacific

The strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific is steadily becoming unpredictable. In the Pacific, Gindarsah (2014) notes that major powers in the region will prefer strategic competition over cooperation. China's military growth, combined with its increased assertiveness and economic power, is steadily becoming a power that should be treated with caution. In the South China Sea, the PLA Navy has made their advance into contested waters near Malaysia and the Philippines.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the U.S. is increasing their presence in the region through their 'Asia Pivot', or rebalance strategy, which aims to maintain the U.S' strategic and economic commitments.<sup>2</sup> Mahadevan (2013) notes that once the 'pivot' has been fully completed, it is expected that almost 60 percent of the U.S. Navy will be stationed in the Pacific.

On a regional level, ASEAN has been an important cornerstone for Indonesian foreign policy and ultimately, the advancement of Indonesian national interest. However, ASEAN remains incapable of resolving ongoing security conflicts amongst and within its members and other great powers in the region. The South China Sea dispute continues to be a potentially disruptive issue within ASEAN. With four ASEAN members as claimants in the dispute and the presence of two major powers in the region, ASEAN cohesion is being tested. The Philippines' relations with China remains tense and as a result, the Philippines have turned to the U.S. and Japan for support. The

U.S. is expected to provide increased military assistance to the Philippines in order to face China<sup>3</sup>, while Japan and the Philippines have signed a defence agreement.<sup>4</sup> Vietnam is actively diversifying its security choices by engaging Russia, the U.S., China, India, and Japan in military diplomacy.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, ASEAN and China have yet to conclude a legally binding Code of Conduct, hindering peaceful resolution in the South China Sea.<sup>6</sup> Aside from multilateral disputes, ASEAN members also have their respective security issues which, if remain unhandled, could affect the stability of the region. Thailand faces a turbulent political situation due to continued rows with anti-government factions despite ongoing peace talks.<sup>7</sup> Sectarian violence in Myanmar has resurfaced, which will severely affect domestic politics, as well as foreign relations and economy.<sup>8</sup> Persecution of minority Muslims has influenced other acts in neighbouring countries, especially in Indonesia, where there have been reports of Rohingya activists seeking out help from radical groups in Indonesia. It is feared that these oppressed minorities might be recruited by a Southeast Asia jihad movement, increasing the

<sup>1</sup> East Asian Strategic Review, p. 160

<sup>2</sup> Clinton, Hillary. 11 October 2011. *America's Pacific Century*. Foreign Policy. Accessed on 2 September 2014 from [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas\\_pacific\\_century](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century)

<sup>3</sup> East Asian Strategic Review, p. 150-151

<sup>4</sup> Department of National Defense Philippines. 2015. *Philippines and Japan Ink Defense Cooperation Agreement*. Accessed on 20 June 2015 from <http://www.dndph.org/2015-updates/philippines-and-japan-ink-defense-cooperation-agreement>

<sup>5</sup> East Asian Strategic Review, p. 153-157

<sup>6</sup> The New York Times. 12 July 2012. *Asian Leaders at Regional Meeting Fail to Resolve Disputes Over South China Sea*. Accessed on 15 September 2014 from

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/13/world/asia/asian-leaders-fail-to-resolve-disputes-on-south-china-sea-during-asean-summit.html>

<sup>7</sup> East Asian Strategic Review, p. 165-167

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 170

probability of a terrorist threat in Southeast Asia.<sup>9</sup>

To address these security issues in Southeast Asia and to further facilitate regional integration in the face of regional uncertainties, ASEAN is to launch the ASEAN Political-Security Community in 2015. However, whether ASEAN could successfully achieve the APSC is still debatable. Solidum (2003) argues that ASEAN's institutions and existing platforms, such as the ASEAN Way, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and the ASEAN Regional Forum, have provided a way for ASEAN to engage in Track Two diplomacy and maintain security in the region. Acharya (2001) praises ASEAN for being a nascent security community despite the many challenges that it faces, while Khoo (2004) argues that ASEAN's negative norms hinder the formation of a full-fledged security community. According to Solidum (2003), security in Southeast Asia was a result of "ASEAN values of peace, economic, social, and cultural development, cooperation, political stability, and regional stability and progress". On the other hand, Jones and Smith (2001) argue that ASEAN is "neither a security nor an economic community, either in being or in prospect." Jones and Smith emphasize on the shallow substance of the organization, criticizing the organization for producing a "rhetorical and institutional shell".

One interesting point of Jokowi's foreign policy platform is the inclusion of the Indian Ocean as an area of Indonesian foreign policy interest. Despite being in close proximity with the Indian Ocean, it has remained out of the Indonesian foreign policy lenses for some time. Being out of the spotlight for the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

the region, known as the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR), has lately become an "area of crucial geostrategic importance" and is also described as "...politically troubled and potentially combustible" (Michel and Sticklor, 2012). The Indian Ocean has become the world's most important energy thoroughfare, fashionably described by Kaplan (2009) as an "economic jugular", with 36 per cent of Middle Eastern oil passing through the Indian Ocean. Developed countries, such as Japan, China and the U.S., rely heavily on Middle Eastern oil imports. Furthermore, the littoral states around the Indian Ocean also boasts abundant economic resources, such as gold, diamonds, oil and gas reserves. Two-thirds of the world's oil reserves and one-third of global gas reserves are located in littoral states of the Indian Ocean. The emergence of China and India further boost the importance of the region as they show interest in the sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) and the overall stability of the states near the Ocean.<sup>10</sup>

Both traditional and non-traditional maritime issues riddle the Indian Ocean region. In a traditional sense, the Indian Ocean is home to some of the world's largest military spenders. With the increased attention from major powers, the region is prone to traditional security threats such as a potential security dilemma fuelled by suspicions between the U.S., China, and India. The three powers are the top five world military powers<sup>11</sup> and all have interests in the region. The U.S. maintains strategic interests in the Indian Ocean as it is vital for the execution of U.S. foreign policy, which involves mobilization of troops for NATO campaigns in the Middle East. China is also seeking to increase its influence in the Indian Ocean in an attempt to balance the U.S. by

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<sup>9</sup> Chanda, Nayan. 12 March 2014. *Rohingyas vs. Buddhists?* Huffington Post. Accessed on 15 September 2014 from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nayan-chanda/rohingyas-vs-buddhists\\_b\\_4950999.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nayan-chanda/rohingyas-vs-buddhists_b_4950999.html)

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<sup>10</sup>Rumley, Dennis (ed.) 2013. *The Indian Ocean Region: Security, Stability, and Sustainability in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Australia India Institute.

<sup>11</sup> The Military Balance 2014.

investing in ports along the Indian Ocean to form their “string of pearls”. Stuck in the middle is India, wary of two great powers showing seeking to expand their influence in the Indian Ocean. The region also faces a nuclear proliferation issue. Tensions are still running high between Iran and Pakistan. There is a possibility that ongoing tensions might cause Iran to adopt a more aggressive nuclear strategy to face Pakistan. Pakistani nukes are also prone to falling into the wrong hands, increasing the fear of nuclear proliferation.<sup>12</sup> The Indian Ocean is becoming a “nuclear ocean” and may play a role in the regional uranium trade.<sup>13</sup> While in a non-traditional sense, unsecure sea routes along the Indian Ocean provide ample opportunities for pirates and maritime terrorism. In 2004, the al-Baqra oil terminal came under attack by suicide bombers.<sup>14</sup> In terms of maritime piracy, from 2001, attacks on energy vessels passing through the Indian Ocean occurred in the Malacca Strait. However, from 2008, more incidents of maritime piracy occurred near Africa due to Somali pirates gaining increased capacity to operate offshore. As a result, in August 2008, a “security corridor” was established in Somali waters to grant safe passage to merchant vessels.<sup>15</sup>

Attempts to bring order to the Indian Ocean began in 1997 with the formation of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) as a multilateral platform to facilitate cooperation among the states in the Indian Ocean. IORA

adopts an “open regionalism” approach, similar to APEC, which is centred on non-binding commitments on a voluntary basis and agreement by consensus (Kelegama, 2002). Driven mostly by economic interests, IORA seeks to provide sustainable growth for its members, mutual economic cooperation, and promote a liberal trade regime in the region. In 2011, during India’s term as chair, IORA added six priorities as the institution’s agenda, namely (1) Maritime Safety and Security; (2) Trade and Investment Facilitation; (3) Fisheries Management and Sustainable Harvesting of Marine Food Resources; (4) Disaster Risk Reduction; (5) Academic and S&T Cooperation; and (6) Tourism Promotion and Cultural Exchanges.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the IORA agenda expanded from merely trade to include maritime and environmental security.

Though IORA seeks to provide a regional platform for cooperation in the region, it faces several challenges. Wagner (2013) notes IORA having a “peculiar legitimacy problem”. Most IORA members are littoral states. According to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), littoral states cannot exercise sovereignty beyond the 12-mile line and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), as the high seas are a public good where states have no claim (*res communis*). Thus, maritime issues occurring in the high seas would require cooperation from the international community. Furthermore, there are concerns, such as from Kelegama (2002), that deeper integration among members would be unachievable due to stark differences among members. Members of the IORA come from different political and economic backgrounds, such as the developed Australia to the less developed Bangladesh. In Kelegama’s words, members of the IORA are “...too diverse, geographically scattered with different levels of development in member

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<sup>12</sup> Behraves, Maysam. 11 November 2014. *The Nuclear Implications of Iran-Pakistan Tensions*. Accessed on 20 June 2015 from <http://thediplomat.com/2014/11/the-nuclear-implications-of-iran-pakistan-tensions/>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> The Guardian. 25 April 2004. *Suicide bombers in boat attack on Iraq oil terminal*. Accessed on 15 September 2014 from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/apr/25/iraq2>

<sup>15</sup> Rumley, 2013, pp. 62-63

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<sup>16</sup> Ministry of External Affairs. 2012. *Annual Report 2011-2012*. New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs.

countries for any meaningful integration to take place.” Based on Kelegama’s observations, the IORA has yet to become an effective regional architecture for maritime security. The absence of a shared interest inhibits the development of definite cooperation among IORA members. Though there have been initiatives, such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and limited joint naval exercises, security cooperation among members are more operational-based and less policy-based (Santikajaya, 2014).

On a domestic level, Indonesia has long retained its inward-looking posture. The Armed Forces (TNI) is more geared towards internal threats, such as separatism and domestic violence, and maintaining national stability.<sup>17</sup> Power projection across the seas has been the least of Indonesia’s priorities for the last decade. As of such, the Armed Forces emphasize more on land forces rather than maritime forces. According to the IISS (2014), in 2014, the Indonesian Navy only has 65 000 personnel amongst the total of 300 400 personnel. This condition is understandable, as Indonesia wishes to maintain a peaceful profile rather than an assertive profile. However, considering the size of the Indonesia’s territory, the size of Indonesia’s military is not enough to meet the Minimum Essential Force (MEF), especially in maritime security. Additionally, Indonesia’s indigenous strategic industries, especially the shipbuilding industry represented by PT PAL, have been slow to develop due to high production costs from taxes and insufficient facilities and equipment.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Defence. 2008. Indonesia Defence White Paper 2008.

<sup>18</sup> The Jakarta Post. 14 August 2013. “Shipbuilders struggle to meet production targets”. The Jakarta Post, accessed 15 May 2015 from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/08/14/shipbuilders-strugglemeet-production-targets.html>

### **Jokowi’s Maritime Axis: What it Means for Foreign Policy and Defence**

Jokowi’s “maritime axis” recognizes Indonesia’s geopolitical position as an archipelagic state and puts emphasis on the maritime domain as a medium for Indonesia’s foreign and defence policy. Jokowi’s foreign policy outlook emphasizes on Indonesia becoming a strong regional maritime power not only in strength but also in diplomacy. Jokowi’s platform acknowledges the importance of maritime diplomacy in resolving territorial maritime disputes with neighbours, the need to safeguard Indonesia’s maritime domain, and alleviating maritime tensions between great powers in the region. It also emphasizes the importance of the Indo-Pacific region for the implementation of Indonesian foreign policy. Jokowi puts forward five points for Indonesia’s regional policy i.e. (1) consolidation of Indonesian leadership in ASEAN, (2) strengthening regional architecture to prevent great power hegemony, (3) development of strategic bilateral ties, (4) managing the impacts of regional economic integration and free trade on domestic economy, and (5) “comprehensive maritime cooperation” through the IORA.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, in his speech at the East Asia Summit in November 2014, Jokowi further elaborated on his “maritime axis” doctrine by listing the five pillars of the maritime axis, namely (1) revival of Indonesian maritime culture and ultimately, archipelagic identity; (2) development of oceans and fisheries; (3) improving maritime economy; (4) maritime diplomacy to address illegal fishing and other security threats; and (5) boosting Indonesia’s maritime defences (Neary, 2014).

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<sup>19</sup> Widodo, Joko and Kalla, Jusuf. May 2014. *Jalan Perubahan untuk Indonesia Yang Berdaulat, Mandiri dan Berkepribadian – Visi Misi, Dan Program Aksi*

ASEAN has always been the cornerstone of Indonesia's foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific and it will likely remain as such. From its foundation, Indonesia has been active in ASEAN to pursue its regional interests. However, with Jokowi's emerging "maritime axis" and subsequent policies, there are indications that ASEAN might be losing its centrality as Indonesia's main multilateral platform. As observed by Syailendra (2015), Indonesia's "high profile" foreign policy approach shows signs of declining engagement in ASEAN in favour of a more nationalistic approach. Recent events, such as the sinking of illegal fishing ships and reluctance to participate in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), can be interpreted as signs of Indonesia's moving away from its ASEAN centrality. However, developing a more nationalistic approach towards ASEAN does not necessarily mean that Indonesia will strike ASEAN off its multilateral institutions list. ASEAN has provided Indonesia with a platform for settling disputes with major powers and connect existing regional organizations within the Asia-Pacific region. Through ASEAN, Indonesia has managed to connect Southeast Asia with some of the larger players in the Asia-Pacific. For example, the ASEAN Regional Forum has provided a means for discussion and cooperation on Asia-Pacific security issues between the U.S., China, and Japan. Jokowi's approach to foreign policy can be considered as pragmatic rather than nationalistic. He aims to show that Indonesia is willing to cooperate with other countries, but not to the extent of comprising national interest. This approach corresponds nicely with Jokowi's vision of consolidating Indonesian leadership in ASEAN. It implies Indonesia's intent on playing a bigger role in ASEAN to further Indonesian national interest through ASEAN as an important foothold in establishing the "maritime axis".

Indonesian interest in the Indian Ocean is a new addition to Indonesia's foreign policy following Jokowi's "maritime axis". In particular, in October 2015, Indonesia will chair the IORA for two years, succeeding Australia as the former chair. It is likely that Jokowi's "maritime axis" takes into account Indonesia's position in IORA. Since the addition of six priorities in 2011, IORA's agenda has a lot in common with Indonesia's interests in the Indian Ocean, particularly maritime security and economic interests according to Jokowi's pillars of the "maritime axis". For example, IORA's agenda on maritime safety and security coincides with Jokowi's interest of developing the Indonesian Navy to better provide regional security against illegal fishing and piracy. Despite IORA still being in a stage of development, Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi insists that IORA remains as a part of Indonesian foreign policy in creating the "maritime axis". Despite IORA's shortcomings, such as a lack of coherent security architecture, Marsudi explains Indonesia's participation in IORA as being based on what Indonesia could contribute for the IORA rather than what IORA could provide for Indonesia.<sup>20</sup> This stance can be considered related to the "active" part of Indonesian foreign policy, where the Foreign Minister sees Indonesia as playing a more active role in developing the regional organization to suit its national interests.

Jokowi's "maritime axis" envisions Indonesia's Navy as a regional maritime power in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>21</sup> This marks a

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<sup>20</sup> Indonesia Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 25 February 2015. *Menlu RI: Melalui Keketuaan IORA, Indonesia Perkuat Poros Maritim*. Accessed 20 June 2015 from <http://www.kemlu.go.id/Pages/News.aspx?IDP=7255&l=id>

<sup>21</sup> Widodo, Joko and Kalla, Jusuf. May 2014. *Jalan Perubahan untuk Indonesia Yang Berdaulat, Mandiri dan Berkepribadian – Visi Misi, Dan Program Aksi*

serious change in Indonesia's previously-held threat perceptions, which were mostly focused on a continental defence outlook. The previous Defence White Paper, published in 2008, puts much emphasis on internal security concerns, such as separatism and internal violence related to ethnicity, religion, race, and communities, and maintaining continental defence, while putting little regard for the numerous naval chokepoints, EEZs, and outer islands in Indonesia. Furthermore, the lack of Indonesian presence in its territorial waters has caused Indonesia to suffer from a lack of deterrence, especially against illegal traders using Indonesia's waterways and island claims by neighbours.<sup>22</sup> To that end, Jokowi plans to gradually increase the defence budget by 1.5 percent over five years, which is to be channelled into defence equipment procurement, rejuvenating the Indonesian strategic industry and developing maritime infrastructure. The increased defence budget is also expected to fund defensive measures in Indonesian waters, such as a military base equipped with combat aircraft in Natuna to protect the island against a potential flashpoint in the South China Sea.<sup>23</sup> But most importantly, the defence budget will be channelled to bolster Indonesia's naval capacity to reach the MEF required to safeguard Indonesian waters.

There is a possibility of Indonesia securing its relationship with India as a strategic partner to carry out the "maritime axis", as both countries share similar interests. The two countries have a long history of bilateral and multilateral ties, especially in the

realm of security and economy. Since the 1990s, India has been expanding its "sphere of influence" in the Indian Ocean and to a larger extent, Southeast Asia, by promoting itself as "benign provider of maritime security" (Brewster, 2011). In 2001, both countries signed a Defence Cooperation Agreement and since then, have conducted numerous defence exchanges. Under the Defence Cooperation Agreement, Indonesia-India security ties also expanded to defence industry cooperation; however, progress in the area seems to be slow. Indonesia has yet to acquire India's Brahmos cruise missile technology. According to Brewster (2011, p. 233), Indonesia's limited defence budget and India's limitations are the key factors hindering further security relations. Aside from defence industry cooperation, India and Indonesia have also been active in maritime security in the Andaman Sea. Since the 1990s, India and Indonesia have conducted joint naval exercises and naval visits to bases in Andaman and Nicobar (Brewster, 2011). In trade, bilateral trade between the two countries reached US\$ 20.1 billion in 2012-2013 and Indonesia has become India's second-largest trading partner in ASEAN (Ministry of External Affairs, 2014). Import-export from the two countries ranges from palm oil to pharmaceuticals. These existing bilateral relations, added with shared interests in the Indo-Pacific and membership in IORA, could become the basis of a fruitful relationship in the future.

## Conclusion

President Joko Widodo's ambitions of a "pan-Indo-Pacific" Indonesia is represented in his maritime axis doctrine of foreign and defence policy. The "maritime axis" doctrine shows a significant expansion in Indonesia's foreign policy and defence ambitions. Not only will Indonesia strive to maintain its ASEAN centrality, it also seeks to expand the

<sup>22</sup> Jakarta Post. 22 March 2007. *RI lacks deterrence force: Juwono*. Accessed 20 June 2015 from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2007/03/22/ri-lacks-deterrence-force-juwono.html>

<sup>23</sup> Tempo. 10 September 2014. *Indonesia to Build Military Base in Natuna*. Accessed 23 June 2015 from <http://en.tempo.co/read/news/2014/09/10/055605767/Indonesia-to-Build-Military-Base-in-Natuna>

Indonesian sphere of influence by “looking west” towards the Indian Ocean. To achieve those ends, Jokowi has decided upon a number of measures, such as reforming the nation’s defence outlook to accommodate a more outward-looking and maritime posture, increasing the defence budget to procure defence equipment, using multilateral platforms to engage with great powers in the region, and actively contribute towards institution-building in the Indo-Pacific. These measures will likely be the highlights of the Jokowi administration throughout his term. Despite these changes, Indonesia’s foreign policy principles of “free and active” will continue to be the foundation of future policies. Jokowi’s maritime axis will see to an Indonesia that plays a larger role in building the Indo-Pacific region.

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