



## **Indonesia's New Maritime Policy towards the Indian Ocean: Implications for China**

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Ms. Premesha Saha's presentation focused on Indonesia's New Maritime Policy towards the Indian Ocean and its implications for China. There has been a transformation in Indonesia's defence outlook in recent years wherein it is reorienting its security policy from domestic concerns to greater focus on the external maritime environment. One of the major factors that contributed to the reformulation of its security policy is the rise of the Asian region in general, and India and China in particular. The rise of the Indian Ocean and its rapidly expanding geostrategic and geo-economic significance has prompted the Indonesian leadership to pay greater attention to this facet in its security policy. These two factors combined have prompted the shift of global attention towards the Asia-Pacific region, or now the more accepted nomenclature the Indo-Pacific region.

The Indian Ocean is increasingly gaining importance in Indonesia's security paradigm. The Strait of Malacca which is the shortest route linking the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea and the Western Pacific is adjacent to Indonesia. Because of increasing cases of piracy along with the strategic centrality of the Strait of Malacca, maritime security in the Indian Ocean is becoming a concern for Indonesia. Indian and Chinese efforts to bolster their naval capabilities leading to growing militarisation in the maritime space of the Indian Ocean is a cause for concern for Indonesia. Indonesia has always been wary of outside powers presence and patrolling in waters of close vicinity. Until 2004, Indonesian policymakers put greater emphasis on internal security due to several domestic factors such as Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Aceh, the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN) forces in East Timor and the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM) forces in West Papua. Indonesian

Secretary of Defence Juwono Sudarsono described national military strategy as one of ‘patience’: hold the lines while a middle class develops further, providing the tax revenue for a larger military, especially a navy; in the meantime, continue to participate in the UN peacekeeping operations to raise its international stature, and thus be morally defended by the international community.

There has been a marked reform in Indonesia’s maritime consciousness since 2004. The ‘dwifungsi’ function was officially dissolved and a major restructuring of the military forces followed in 2007. An India-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership was formed in 2005. Former Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa put forth his ‘Pacific-Indo-Pacific’ vision and a proposal for Indo-Pacific Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. He described his vision as “a triangular (space) spanning two oceans, the Pacific and Indian Oceans, bounded by Japan in the north, Australia in the South-east and India in the south-west, notably with Indonesia at its centre”. This vision was also clearly reflected in the statement of the former President Susilo Yudhoyono at the 2012 Shangri La Dialogue, where he stated that, “there is every likelihood that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Indian Ocean will grow in geostrategic importance. We must make sure that the Indian Ocean does not become an area of new strategic contest and rivalry. Indeed, now is the time to cultivate the seeds for long-term cooperation, based on common interests in that part of the world.”

Indonesian President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) outlined an ambitious vision for his country as a ‘Global Maritime Fulcrum’ (GMF) at the 9<sup>th</sup> East Asia Summit meeting in November 2014. This vision represents a development agenda focusing on rebuilding the country’s maritime culture as well as expanding its economy. His GMF vision focuses on five key areas: maritime culture, marine resources, archipelagic connectivity, maritime diplomacy, and naval development. The underlying vision of the GMF is not new but the approach being undertaken for giving shape to his ambitious vision are said to be more ‘assertive’, ‘nationalistic’ and ‘self-centred’.

Indonesia’s position towards the South China Sea dispute has been consistent for the past several years. It claims that it is not a party to the South China Sea dispute, though China’s nine-dash line encloses the Indonesian-claimed Natuna Islands. This position is likely to change under Jokowi. According to a recent update in the *Jakarta Post*, Indonesian officials are planning to build a new base near the Natuna Islands. In March 2015, President Jokowi commented that, “The “nine-dashed line” that China says marks its maritime border has no

basis in any international law.’ Nevertheless, Jokowi is very cautious in his approach towards China since a lot is at stake. An interest has already been expressed to benefit from China’s Maritime Silk Route plan. President Widodo ordered the sinking of foreign fishing boats that unlawfully enter Indonesian archipelagic waters. This is in accordance with Indonesian domestic law. This policy is negatively impacting the image of Indonesia as the neighbouring countries are concerned that Indonesia is finally coming out of its shell and beginning to use hard power.

This change in Indonesia’s military strategy bears several implications for Indonesia-China relations. Indonesia’s continued forays in the Indian Ocean have increased the scope and frequency of encounters with China. It seems to seek Chinese friendship which is evident from the fact that it has undertaken construction of two international seaports in Kuala Tanjung and Bitung. It also did not sink any Chinese illegal fishing vessels for a long time while maintaining a tough stance against Vietnamese and Filipino fishing boats. China recently became Indonesia’s top trading partner replacing Japan. It took lesser time for Indonesia to ratify defence cooperation with India than with China, which is symbolic of the state of Indonesia’s bilateral relations with the two regional powers.

## **Discussion**

In the following discussion, several of the questions revolved around comparing Indonesia’s Global Maritime Fulcrum policy with similar maritime policies of countries in its vicinity. On being asked about similarities between GMF and China’s Maritime Silk Road, the speaker asserted that there was no contest between the two countries. The two policies are complementary in nature and there is scope for mutual cooperation between China and Indonesia. Another question was asked on similarity between GMF and India’s Mausam project. The speaker answered that since both the projects have a maritime inclination, they can be complementary as well. A question was asked about potential sources of funding for Indonesia to realize its goal of becoming the GMF. The speaker explained that Indonesia has already secured investments from Japan and South Korea. It is currently in talks with the US, and there are considerable chances of success given America’s Asia pivot policy.

A question was asked if the motivation behind GMF is President Jokowi’s personal ambition or national aspiration. The speaker responded that both factors were driving forces behind this policy. Jokowi is the first president outside Jakarta’s elite and faced criticism over his

inexperience when he took over. Thus, there is an element of personal ambition and greatness behind this project. He also plans to continue the previous leaders' legacy of developing Indonesia into a middle power, so the national ambition factor cannot be ruled out either. On being asked if Indonesia was trying to be central to ASEAN and India's stance on this, the speaker asserted that Indonesia has always worked towards being central to ASEAN. It has played a critical role in most major disputes resolved by ASEAN. It has been reluctant to let India play a greater role in ASEAN as it fears India might overshadow it.

The term PACINDO piqued the audience's interest and a question was asked on the nature of this concept. The speaker explained that the term has no new connotation, except being an attempt to break from the legacy of previous "Pacific-Indo-Pacific" vision. Questions were also asked about the nature of navy that Indonesia plans to build. The speaker responded by explaining the Minimum Essential Force (MEF) agenda, a twenty-year plan (2005-2024) for military modernization with a special emphasis on the navy and air force. In the context of naval build up, the MEF goal is to develop a five-fleet force, totalling 274 ships with striking, patrolling and supporting capabilities by 2020. The plan involves weapons procurement, the development of an indigenous defence industry, and the revamping of defence research facilities.

*Report prepared by Prateeksha Tiwari, Research Assistant, Institute of Chinese Studies.*

### **About the Speaker**

Premesha Saha is a doctoral scholar at the Centre for Indo-Pacific Studies in the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and a Research Associate at the National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi. Her doctoral research focusses on Indonesia's New Maritime Policy towards the Indian Ocean 2004-2014. She completed her Masters in International Relations from Jadavpur University, West Bengal. Her article on "The Genesis of the Scarborough Shoal Dispute between the Philippines and China" in Prof. Manmohini Kaul and Dr. Anushree Chakraborty (eds.) *India's Look East to Act East Policy: Re-examining the emerging issues and partnerships in Indo-Pacific*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press has been published in 2016. She has been publishing her work on Indonesia's new maritime vision on the National Maritime Foundation website. Her research interests include maritime issues in the Asia-Pacific region, geo-politics of the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific

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