

Quo Vadis : Indonesian Government and Maritime Commitment

By Tangguh Chairil

As many experts, like Evan Laksmana (2019), have pointed out, Indonesia's "Global Maritime Fulcrum" (GMF) vision has died during President Joko Widodo's second term. The Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs, which the previous president established in his first term, persisted until the end of his second term in 2024, but its name was changed to the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs and Investments (*Kemenko Marves*) as its tasks were expanded by including investment to its portfolio in Jokowi's second term.

As the new administration of President Prabowo Subianto began its term, it begets the question: where will the new government go in terms of its commitment to the maritime sector? This question is significant for three reasons: First, during his campaign, Prabowo has promised to continue Jokowi's programs. Second, Prabowo's running mate, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, is Jokowi's son; thus, he might want to carry on his father's legacy. Third, despite its "death" during Jokowi's second term, the reasons why Indonesia needs to prioritize maritime issues persist.

However, it seems so far that Prabowo and Gibran had little interest in the maritime sector. Their campaign's vision and missions document called "*Asta Cita*" only mentions "blue economy" as part of its missions, and only lists the "down-streaming and industrialization based on natural resources and maritime sector" as one of its 17 priority programs. After being inaugurated, their unveiled cabinet no longer has the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs, despite adding the number of coordinating ministries from four to seven (Indonesia's Cabinet Secretariat, 2024). The coordinating ministry was disbanded, with its tasks divided into other coordinating ministries and the National Economic Council (CNBC Indonesia, 2024).

Member of the House of Representatives (DPR), Rokhmin Dahuri, said that the Prabowo administration disbanded the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs because economic performance in the maritime sectors did not produce the expected economic growth and welfare (Republik Merdeka Online, 2024). This reflects a view that subsumes the maritime sector under economic affairs, which has been apparent since Jokowi's second term.

Despite the importance of economic sector, maritime affairs in the political and security sector are also a pressing matter for Indonesia – especially with the ongoing maritime disputes in the South China Sea. Immediately after the new administration was inaugurated, in October 2024 a China Coast Guard (CCG) vessel CCG-5402 entered Indonesia's maritime territory without permission and harassed Indonesia's oil and gas exploration activities in the Arwana Block around the Natuna Islands. Indonesia had to send its Maritime Security Agency (*Bakamla*) vessel KN Tanjung Datu-301 to expel the Chinese ship (Antara News, 2024).

Furthermore, the administration also received criticism after Prabowo's visit to China in November 2024 produced a China-Indonesia's joint statement that mentions "areas of overlapping claims" (Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a), which Indonesia never acknowledged before (Kumparan News, 2024). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Kemlu*) immediately stated that the cooperation with China should not be interpreted as an acknowledgement of China's nine-dash line claims (Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b), but people continue to question the move for not being in accordance with the law of the sea.

The maritime sector is not only important in economic terms, but also in political and security terms. Jokowi's move to subsume maritime affairs under investments, as well as Prabowo's subsequent disbandment of the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs, shows how little regards the two administrations place on the maritime sector. The new administration should remedy this by addressing Indonesia's most significant maritime governance capacity gaps (Chairil, 2023):

First, by clearly defining the roles and responsibilities among the various maritime governance agencies in Indonesia, and how these agencies coordinate with each other with the absence of a coordinating ministry. Second, by improving the operational capacity of these agencies by increasing the number of warships, patrol vessels, maritime sensors, and other equipment. Third, by continuing and expanding international cooperation on the maritime sector in terms of information and intelligence exchange and fusion, procurement of equipment, capacity building for personnel skills, and industry cooperation.

Short Bio

Tangguh Chairil is currently a faculty member of the Department of International Relations at Bina Nusantara University (Binus), Jakarta, Indonesia. His scientific discipline is International Relations studies, with a focus on Security Studies. He teaches courses on security studies and foreign policy. His research fields include defense and military studies, with security issues in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, as his center of interest.

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