

## Conference Paper

# Aceh AS Indonesia Maritime Diplomacy Across the Indian Ocean

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### Abstract

Aceh which is located in strategic location on the lanes of international trade between Malacca Strait and the Indian Ocean, therefore, Aceh's relationship with the communities in the coastal areas of the Indian Ocean has lasted over centuries. Acehnese cooperate with the community of Indian Ocean not only in economic but also cultural field in order to strengthen the archipelago's history. Under the governance of President Jokowi, Indonesian foreign policy is attempted to strengthen Indonesia as World Maritime Center. Given its strategic position in the Indian Ocean region and the diverse potential, Aceh is expected to be a cornerstone for the achievement of national policy.

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## 1. Introduction

Under the governance of President Joko Widodo, Indonesia wanted to be addressed as one of the world's maritime powers by integrating two oceans as a strategic environmental foreign policy in the region. Therefore, Indonesia's foreign policy is directed to play a greater role in the Indian Ocean region and the Pacific.

Compared to the Pacific Ocean Areas, efforts to develop regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean is relatively minimal. The world now just to see the potential generated by the Pacific Ocean without further develop the potential of the Indian Ocean. Whereas the Indian Ocean Region is an area rich in natural resources, both mineral and fisheries and energy for industrial raw materials. Not only has Indian Ocean long been known as the trade lanes and heart of international economics including northern part of South Asia, Africa and western Middle East, Indonesia and eastern Australia, and the southern Antarctic. Given the potential, the vision of maritime that was aimed by Indonesia should not emphasize only the importance of the eastern Pacific region but also the Indian Ocean Region in western part of Indonesia.

Located at the intersection of international trade lanes between Malacca Strait and the Indian Ocean that leads to Australia and the Pacific region, Aceh has a strategic

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geographical position not only for trading but also political diplomacy. In addition, Aceh has the potential abundance of natural and human resources; culture and history, as well as a set of rules and regulations that define the area of the province as an independent autonomous region in Indonesia. This paper aims to identify opportunities that can be taken by Aceh province for the national interest in promoting cooperation in various fields with the coastal countries of the Indian Ocean region.

## 2. Vision of World Maritime Axis

Vision of World Maritime Axis was first launched by President Jokowi on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit, on 13 November 2014 in Myanmar. This vision has five main pillars, namely (1) rebuilding the maritime culture; (2) improving the maritime economy; (3) improving maritime infrastructure and connectivity; (4) being involved in maritime diplomacy; and (5) strengthening maritime defense.

In the pillars of the world maritime axis, it is stated that Indonesia will maintain and manage marine resources by focusing on building food sovereignty of the sea through the development of the fishing industry; Indonesia will undertake the infrastructure development and maritime connectivity, including the development of the shipping industry and maritime tourism; Indonesia will encourage cooperation to eliminate the sources of conflict in the sea, such as illegal fishing, a violation of sovereignty, territorial disputes, piracy and marine pollution; and Indonesia will also establish a maritime defense to protect the sovereignty and maritime wealth as well as to maintain the safety of shipping and maritime security.

The emergence of maritime vision is not meaningless, it is a national call for Indonesia to return to its true identity as an archipelago and maritime. According to Rizal Sukma, one of the international relations academic figure in Indonesia, World Maritime Axis can be seen as a vision, doctrine, and a set of the development agenda. As a vision, World Maritime Axis is an ideal Indonesia. As a doctrine, it emphasizes the reality of geographic, geopolitics and geo-economic Indonesia whose future depends on, and will affect the dynamics in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. As a set of the development agenda, World Maritime Axis Policy provides a set of concrete agenda of the government to implement the development agenda, such as building connectivity among islands, the development of shipbuilding and ship repair facilities, the fishing industry, marine transportation, and maritime security. World Maritime Axis Policy will naturally benefit Indonesia in the aspect of sovereignty, security, and prosperity.

With the doctrine of maritime axis, Jokowi Government attempts to make Indonesia as the maritime power country which has big influence between two oceans, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific by integrating two oceans as a strategic environmental foreign policy in the region. This can be a significant change for the foreign policy of Indonesia which previously emphasized more on the centrality of ASEAN.

### 3. The Importance of the Indian Ocean to Indonesia

One interesting thing from Jokowi's foreign policy platform above is the inclusion of the Indian Ocean as the area of Indonesia's foreign policy. Despite being close to the Indian Ocean, this area does not get much attention in Indonesian foreign policy during the last period until the events of December 2004 Tsunami that devastated most of the province.

Indian Ocean has been described as one of the five priority agenda of regional cooperation identified by President Jokowi in his election manifesto. Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has included the Indian Ocean Association for Regional Cooperation (IORA) as a focus area of regional multilateral diplomacy. The inclusion of the Indian Ocean expands Indonesia's maritime and put the country, again, in two maritime centers of the world and as the bridge between them.

There are at least two major factors why the Indian Ocean Region becomes important from the perspective of the national interest of Indonesia. First, the Indian Ocean has long been known as an international trade route and became a major transit point for commercial goods and energy trade between continents. Indian Ocean stretches from the East Coast of Africa and the Middle East to the west coast of Australia and the Malay Peninsula and borders the South Coast of Asia. In this area there are several choke-point which are vital for traffic flow of world trade, i.e. the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Aden (Bab el-Mandeb) and the Strait of Malacca. In addition, the other alternative choke-points are located in the Sunda Strait and the Lombok Strait. According to the Journal of the Indian Ocean Region, the sea lanes in the Indian Ocean are considered as the most strategic in the world since more than 80 percent of global oil trade transit through the choke-points of the Indian Ocean, where 40 percent passing through the Strait of Hormuz, 35 percent through Strait of Malacca and 8 percent through the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb.

Secondly, Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean in the world. There are 48 islands and coastal countries (18 in Africa, 11 in the middle east, 7 in South Asia, 6 in Southeast Asia, 5 island countries and Australia, while France and the UK still has some power in

the region of small islands). The total population of the Indian Ocean region is about 2.6 billion, or 39% of the total world population. With the number of this population, the Indian Ocean is a great power for world's economic growth. In addition to be served as international water traffic, Indian Ocean also rich in natural resources. Indian Ocean also has potential in the fisheries sector due to various types of fish, especially tuna. Other potentials are the tourism sector and the mining sector due to various sources of future mine located in this region. A report stated that coastal countries in the Indian Ocean region are estimated to save around 62% of oil reserves and 48% of gas reserves in the world. While the Middle East is the source of many of the world's reserves of oil and gas, other countries in the Indian Ocean region have lots of minerals needed to fuel rapid economic growth of Asia. On the other hand, Africa is the source of about a third of the world of commodities, including strategic raw materials such as platinum, manganese, nickel and cobalt.

Indian Ocean will potentially become the center of world growth in the future. The whole potential has not been maximized so that it is important to study various possibilities to develop them. Therefore, they will no longer become a mere potential but a real form of change.

#### 4. Aceh's Relationship with the Indian Ocean

It is undeniable that the history of politics, economics, and culture of Acehnese are influenced by interactions with coastal communities in the Indian Ocean. Because of its location between Eastern and Western cultures, Aceh has become a major transit of merchant ships from China, Europe, India and the Arab calling at ports in Aceh to trade. This relationship makes the Aceh as the first entrance of culture and religion to the archipelago. It can be seen from the development of local heritages influenced by both Hindu and Islamic culture. According to historical records, Aceh was the first place to develop Islam in Indonesia where the first Islamic kingdom existed in Peureulak and Pasai.

Furthermore, the ups and downs of political empire in the Aceh was also influenced by interactions with foreigners who look for powers, particularly in the Malacca Strait. The seizing of political space commerce and trade line gives new color in the political history of the kingdom of Aceh in the past. In the 19th century, commercial relations between Aceh and the coastal communities in the Indian Ocean began to fade along with the weakening royal power of Aceh.

In the era of Indonesia's post-independence, the relations between Aceh and the Indian Ocean coastal communities in both trade and politics are not too dominant. Although Aceh was socially an important transit port to Hajj pilgrims, the relationship was considered as an external instead of internal one. The only important contacts between Aceh and the Indian Ocean is the existence of the Sabang Free Port which were constructed during the Dutch colonial period, and was revived by the central government in 1963. At that time, Sabang become a place of transit of ships from Europe and East Asia sailing in the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, the closure Sabang free port in the 1980s became a deterioration to the importance of the port of Aceh in the Indian Ocean region and also impede the communication between Acehnese and the coastal communities in the Indian Ocean.

## 5. IORA and Aceh Modalities

Declared in 1997, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) has developed into one of regional cooperation which is important for the coastal countries of the Indian Ocean region based on economic and socio-cultural cooperation. In its recent development, IORA has set six pillars of organizational development, i.e. security and maritime safety; disaster risk management; trade and investment; fisheries management; academic as well as science and technology cooperation; and tourism and culture. These six pillars become basic guidance for IORA in the future.

Located in the western end of Indonesia and bordered by Indian Ocean, Aceh has modalities as the leading province in Indonesia to encourage a cooperative framework in IORA. For instance, Aceh has its own advantage in the field of trade and investment, especially its authority in regulating government affairs in certain fields as envisaged by Law No. 11 Year 2006. In addition, compared to other provinces in Indonesia, Aceh has directly authorized by the Centre to establish economic and sociocultural cooperation with international community (the Presidential Regulation No. 11 Year 2010 concerning Aceh Government cooperation with the Institute or the Agency Abroad). The comparative advantages facilitate the Indonesian economic diplomacy in encouraging investment in the economy later. Potential in the other field of trade is the establishment of regional trading Sabang Free Port and as stated in article 170 of Law No. 167 to 11/2006. In this region, there has been set some ease in terms of trade regulation, exemption from import duties and certain taxes. Given a very strategic location at the intersections of the world's busiest international waterway, Sabang port, both operationally and geographically have the potential to become a major port

in the Indian Ocean. In the field of fisheries, the Indian Ocean region has been known as an area that produce most tuna in the world. Aceh fishing port especially Lampulo international fishing port, can be further developed as the international tuna management industry. Therefore, Aceh has the potential to become the center of a new regional economic growth for the western part of Indonesia. These are the modality of Aceh province in an effort to promote and improve Indonesia's trade cooperation with other regions in the Indian Ocean coast.

In the field of disaster risk management, Aceh also have experience in disaster management done by a variety of stakeholders. It can be seen from the post-tsunami management which is run by BRR and hundreds of other international institutions in Aceh during the emergency response, rehabilitation and reconstruction. These efforts have become important lessons for the international humanitarian community in facing similar condition in the future. Furthermore, the existence of Tsunami Disaster Study Center or TDMRC in Aceh should be improved in its role as a center of international studies on the tsunami disaster in which the Indian Ocean coastal countries can learn and share experiences.

In the field of tourism and culture, Aceh has the potential of natural and cultural attractions. The cooperation in promoting Aceh as one of the tourism resort can be encouraged through attracting interest not only for international travel agencies from Europe, but also from India, and countries in the Middle East and Africa. It is due to a variety of cultural and historical sites showing how close the relationship among communities in coastal areas of the Indian Ocean was created in the past. Therefore, Aceh potentially became one of the tourism resort in the western tip of Indonesia.

## 6. Conclusion

Given its strategic position and modalities, Aceh inevitably become an important area for Indonesia especially in the western part of the efforts to reinforce the new direction of foreign policy of Indonesia as the world's maritime axis. To realize this, it is important for the central government to put more attention to the development of the infrastructure and economy in Aceh. Finally, once the Indian Ocean is believed as the future of world's economic growth which is valuable to politic, culture, and trading, Aceh will be positioned as a cornerstone of Indonesia's diplomacy in the region of the Indian Ocean.

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