

# Indonesia's Maritime Diplomacy under Joko Widodo Administration: Advancing the Global Maritime Fulcrum Vision

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Indonesia; maritime diplomacy; Global Maritime Fulcrum; Joko Widodo, foreign policy	This research examines Indonesia's maritime diplomacy during the administration of President Joko Widodo (2014–2024) within the framework of the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) vision. The research aims to analyze how Indonesia leveraged its maritime diplomacy to project its strategic identity and address challenges such as illegal fishing, maritime boundary disputes, and regional cooperation. Using qualitative analysis of policy documents, official speeches, and multilateral engagements, the study identifies Indonesia's adoption of cooperative, persuasive, and coercive approaches to maritime diplomacy. Results reveal significant progress in fostering regional maritime cooperation, reducing illegal fishing activities, and promoting Indonesia's Indo-Pacific outlook. However, challenges such as implementation gaps, sovereignty disputes, and navigating major power competition persist. The study concludes that sustained maritime diplomacy is critical for Indonesia to realize its full status as a Global Maritime Fulcrum. It also suggests further enhancements in institutional coordination, resource allocation, and international partnerships to solidify its maritime leadership.

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## Introduction

When Joko Widodo assumed the presidency of Indonesia in 2014, he articulated a bold and ambitious vision to transform Indonesia into a "Global Maritime Fulcrum" (Poros Maritim Dunia). This strategic concept aimed to reassert Indonesia's maritime identity, which has historically been central to its cultural and geopolitical identity, and to position the country as a pivotal maritime power bridging the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Connelly, 2015). The initiative recognized Indonesia's geographical advantage as the world's largest archipelagic state, comprising over 17,000 islands. It sought to leverage this position to bolster its influence in regional and global maritime affairs.

The "Global Maritime Fulcrum" framework was built on five main pillars: maritime security, connectivity and infrastructure, marine resource development, maritime diplomacy, and maritime culture (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). Maritime diplomacy emerged as a cornerstone of this vision, underscoring Indonesia's commitment to fostering peaceful and cooperative relations with neighboring countries while addressing transnational challenges such as illegal fishing, piracy, and territorial disputes. This approach reflected Indonesia's dual role as both a regional stabilizer in

Southeast Asia and an advocate for equitable and sustainable maritime governance on the global stage (Sebastian & Chen, 2021).

Through maritime diplomacy, Indonesia engaged in multilateral forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) to promote collaborative security measures and strengthen its leadership in maritime governance. This diplomacy also extended to bilateral partnerships, where Indonesia sought to negotiate maritime boundary agreements and assert its sovereign rights, as exemplified in the Natuna Islands' territorial disputes (Perwita & Montratama, 2021). By integrating maritime diplomacy with its broader maritime vision, Indonesia aspired to not only enhance its strategic standing but also to contribute to regional stability and global maritime security.

In multilateral settings, Indonesia played a proactive role in organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Through these platforms, Indonesia advocated for collaborative security measures and the establishment of norms governing maritime conduct. For instance, Indonesia's leadership in promoting the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific underscored its commitment to an inclusive and rules-based regional order (Weatherbee, 2019).

Bilateral maritime diplomacy was also a focal point, particularly in managing relations with neighboring countries over maritime boundaries. The Natuna Islands, located in the southern reaches of the South China Sea, became a significant area of focus due to overlapping claims with China. Indonesia's firm stance in asserting its sovereign rights over these waters was evident through diplomatic protests and increased naval patrols, reflecting a balance between diplomatic engagement and the protection of national interests (Laksamana, 2017).

Furthermore, Indonesia's maritime diplomacy extended to addressing non-traditional security threats. The country actively participated in regional initiatives aimed at combating piracy and illegal fishing, recognizing that such issues required cooperative solutions. Indonesia's efforts in this regard were instrumental in the establishment of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), highlighting its leadership in promoting maritime security (Bateman, 2015).

The article argues that maritime diplomacy served as a vital foreign policy tool for Indonesia to assert its archipelagic outlook and maritime interests. However, while Indonesia made notable strides in some areas, challenges remained in fully realizing its maritime ambitions by the end of Widodo's tenure in 2024.

This study's contribution lies in its comprehensive analysis of how Indonesia operationalized its maritime diplomacy to align with the GMF vision, filling a gap in the literature on the practical implementation of maritime policies. Furthermore, the research offers actionable insights into overcoming persistent challenges, such as gaps in policy implementation and the balancing act of navigating major power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific. Ultimately, this study enriches the discourse on maritime governance and contributes to the strategic policy development needed to solidify Indonesia's role as a Global Maritime Fulcrum.

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## Materials and Methods

The following sections provide a conceptual framework for analyzing maritime diplomacy, outline Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum vision, examine key focus areas of Indonesia's maritime diplomacy efforts, assess outcomes and challenges, and offer conclusions on the overall effectiveness of Indonesia's approach.

Maritime diplomacy refers to the management of international relations with respect to the maritime domain through diplomatic instruments (Mière, 2014). It involves the use of maritime capabilities and resources to further a country's national interests and foreign policy objectives.

Christian Le Miere (2014) conceptualizes maritime diplomacy as encompassing three main types: 1) Cooperative maritime diplomacy: Collaborative efforts to address shared maritime challenges and promote common interests. 2) Persuasive maritime diplomacy: The use of maritime assets to influence the behavior of other states through attraction or dissuasion. 3) Coercive maritime diplomacy: The threat or use of force at sea to compel an adversary to change its behavior.

This framework provides a valuable lens through which to analyze Indonesia's multifaceted maritime diplomacy approach under Joko Widodo. As this article will demonstrate, Indonesia employed elements of all three types in pursuing its maritime objectives.

Additionally, Sugiarto and Muryani (2023) highlight that maritime diplomacy for archipelagic states like Indonesia involves asserting sovereignty over maritime territories, protecting marine resources, and leveraging geographic position for strategic and economic gain. This archipelagic perspective is crucial for understanding Indonesia's maritime diplomacy motivations.

## Results and Discussions

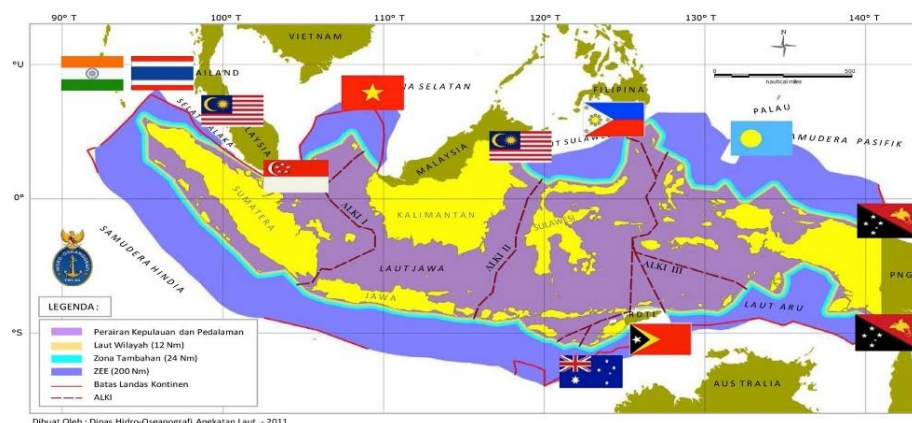
### Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum Vision

To contextualize Indonesia's maritime diplomacy efforts, it is important to understand the overarching Global Maritime Fulcrum vision articulated by President Widodo. This concept was first introduced at the 2014 East Asia Summit in Myanmar, where Widodo declared Indonesia's intention to become a maritime axis between the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Widodo, 2014).

The Global Maritime Fulcrum doctrine encompassed five key pillars (Laksmana, 2017): 1) Reviving Indonesia's maritime culture and identity; 2) Improving management of marine resources; 3) Developing maritime infrastructure and connectivity; 4) Strengthening maritime diplomacy; 5) Bolstering maritime defense capabilities.

Maritime diplomacy was thus explicitly recognized as a core element of this vision from the outset. The concept aimed to reorient Indonesia's strategic outlook to leverage its archipelagic geography and vast maritime domain (Connelly, 2015). In 2017, the vision was further codified through Presidential Regulation No. 16/2017 on the Indonesian Ocean Policy. This regulation outlined a more comprehensive framework for realizing the Global Maritime Fulcrum across various sectors (Negara & Das, 2017).

The Global Maritime Fulcrum concept represented a significant shift in Indonesia's strategic doctrine. It sought to move beyond the traditional inward-looking and land-based outlook to position Indonesia as an outward-looking maritime power (Laksmana, 2017). Maritime diplomacy would play a crucial role in projecting this new orientation on the international stage.



**Figure 1. Indonesia Maritime Borders**

Source: <https://www.inadis.org/>

Drawing on the conceptual framework outlined earlier, this section examines the key focus areas and strategies of Indonesia's maritime diplomacy efforts under the Widodo administration from 2014 to 2024. It analyzes how Indonesia employed cooperative, persuasive, and coercive approaches across different domains. A significant thrust of Indonesia's maritime diplomacy was to enhance cooperation with regional partners on maritime issues. This aligns with the cooperative maritime diplomacy approach in Miere's (2014) framework.

One of the primary drivers of this was Indonesia's leadership of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) from 2015 to 2017. Indonesia used its IORA chairmanship to promote its maritime agenda and strengthen Indian Ocean cooperation (Andika, 2018). Key initiatives included hosting the first-ever IORA Leaders' Summit in 2017 and pushing for the Jakarta Concord, which outlined a shared vision for maritime cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).

Indonesia also sought to reinvigorate maritime cooperation within ASEAN. It proposed new initiatives like the ASEAN Maritime Forum and pushed for greater collaboration on issues like marine environmental protection and maritime connectivity (Parameswaran, 2020). Through the East Asia Summit, Indonesia advocated for an Indo-Pacific regional architecture with ASEAN at its center (Weatherbee, 2019).

Bilaterally, Indonesia signed maritime cooperation agreements with several countries, including India, South Korea, and Australia. These covered areas like naval cooperation, maritime security, and blue economy development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). Such agreements helped Indonesia expand its network of maritime partnerships. Addressing illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing emerged as a key priority in Indonesia's maritime diplomacy efforts. This combined cooperative approaches with more coercive measures.

On the cooperative front, Indonesia spearheaded regional initiatives to combat IUU fishing. In 2016, it hosted the Regional Conference on the Establishment of a Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices (Parameswaran, 2020). Indonesia also pushed for stronger anti-IUU fishing provisions in forums like ASEAN and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (Connelly, 2015).

Domestically, Indonesia took a hardline stance by instituting a policy of sinking foreign vessels caught fishing illegally in its waters. Between 2014 and 2019, Indonesia sank over 500 foreign fishing vessels (Gindarsah & Priamarizki, 2022). While controversial, this policy sent a strong deterrent

message and demonstrated Indonesia's resolve to protect its maritime resources. Indonesia also engaged in "persuasive" diplomacy by inviting foreign journalists and officials to witness the vessel's sinking operations (Parameswaran, 2020). This helped generate international attention and support for Indonesia's anti-IUU fishing efforts.

Another key focus was leveraging diplomacy to attract investment and support for developing Indonesia's maritime infrastructure and connectivity. This aligned with the Global Maritime Fulcrum's emphasis on strengthening Indonesia's maritime economy. Indonesia actively promoted its maritime infrastructure plans at international forums and to potential foreign investors. Major initiatives included the Sea Toll Road program to enhance inter-island connectivity and the development of deep-sea ports (Negara & Das, 2017).

To attract financing, Indonesia engaged with multilateral initiatives like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Japan's Partnership for Quality Infrastructure. However, Indonesia was selective in its engagement, seeking to balance between competing offers while maintaining strategic autonomy (Weatherbee, 2019).

Indonesia also used maritime diplomacy to promote itself as a maritime tourism destination. It launched the "Wonderful Indonesia" campaign internationally and pushed for visa-free policies to boost marine tourism (Ministry of Tourism, 2019). A crucial element of Indonesia's maritime diplomacy was asserting its status and rights as an archipelagic state. This involved both cooperative and more assertive approaches.

Indonesia actively promoted the "archipelagic outlook" in various international forums, emphasizing the interconnectedness of its waters and islands (Andika, 2018). It sought to generate greater recognition of the specific needs and perspectives of archipelagic states. More assertively, Indonesia took steps to reinforce its maritime sovereignty claims. This included renaming part of the South China Sea within its exclusive economic zone as the "North Natuna Sea" in 2017 (Parameswaran, 2020). While not changing international law, this sent a signal about Indonesia's maritime territorial claims.

Indonesia also increased its maritime presence and patrols in disputed areas, particularly around the Natuna Islands. This demonstrated Indonesia's determination to protect its maritime interests, even in the face of challenges from more considerable powers like China (Connelly, 2015). In the latter part of Widodo's tenure, Indonesia's maritime diplomacy increasingly focused on promoting its concept of the Indo-Pacific region. This represented a more proactive effort to shape the regional architecture.

In 2019, Indonesia launched its "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific," which emphasized ASEAN centrality and an inclusive, cooperation-based regional order (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). Through extensive diplomatic outreach, Indonesia successfully garnered ASEAN-wide support for this outlook.

Indonesia also sought to position itself as a key Indo-Pacific maritime power through initiatives like the Indonesia-South Pacific Forum. This aimed to enhance Indonesia's engagement with South Pacific island nations on maritime issues (Weatherbee, 2019). Indonesia's maritime diplomacy efforts under Joko Widodo yielded mixed results.

Indonesia made notable progress in enhancing regional maritime cooperation, mainly through its leadership of IORA and initiatives within ASEAN (Amri & Zahidi, 2023). The Jakarta Concord adopted under Indonesia's IORA chairmanship represented a milestone in fostering Indian Ocean



cooperation (Andika, 2018). However, challenges remained in translating high-level commitments into concrete action. Implementation of maritime cooperation agreements often lagged behind the rhetoric. Additionally, rising major power competition in the Indo-Pacific complicated Indonesia's efforts to promote ASEAN-centered cooperation (Weatherbee, 2019).

Indonesia's tough stance on illegal fishing, including the vessel sinking policy, contributed to a significant reduction in IUU fishing in Indonesian waters. The number of foreign fishing vessels operating illegally declined by over 90% between 2014 and 2019 (Gindarsah & Priamarizki, 2019).

However, this hardline approach also created diplomatic tensions with some neighboring countries, particularly China and Vietnam. Sustaining regional support for anti-IUU fishing efforts remained a challenge (Parameswaran, 2020). Indonesia made some headway in developing its maritime infrastructure, including new ports and improved inter-island connectivity. Foreign investment in the maritime sector increased, with several significant projects launched under the Sea Toll Road program (Negara & Das, 2017).

However, progress fell short of the ambitious targets initially set. Regulatory uncertainty and bureaucratic hurdles continued to hamper foreign investment in some areas. Additionally, concerns arose about the long-term economic viability and environmental impact of specific projects (Weatherbee, 2019). Indonesia's efforts to assert its archipelagic outlook gained some traction internationally. There was greater recognition of Indonesia's archipelagic perspective in regional forums (Andika, 2018).

However, challenges to Indonesia's maritime sovereignty claims persisted, particularly in the North Natuna Sea area. Incursions by Chinese fishing vessels and coast guard ships continued to test Indonesia's resolve to protect its maritime rights. Indonesia's Indo-Pacific outlook gained widespread support within ASEAN and helped cement Indonesia's role as a key regional maritime player. The Indonesia-South Pacific Forum also enhanced Indonesia's maritime engagement beyond its immediate neighborhood (Weatherbee, 2019).

However, Indonesia faced a delicate balancing act in navigating US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific. Maintaining strategic autonomy while engaging with both significant powers remained an ongoing challenge for Indonesia's maritime diplomacy (Laksmana, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

This research analyzed Indonesia's maritime diplomacy under the Joko Widodo administration (2014–2024) within the framework of the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) vision. The findings highlight that maritime diplomacy has been instrumental in projecting Indonesia's maritime identity and advancing its strategic interests on the international stage. Key areas of focus included fostering regional maritime cooperation, addressing illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, enhancing maritime infrastructure, and asserting Indonesia's sovereignty in disputed waters.

The research found that Indonesia achieved notable progress, particularly in strengthening its regional leadership through initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. The implementation of strict anti-IUU fishing measures significantly reduced illegal fishing activities in Indonesian waters. However, challenges such as policy implementation gaps, unresolved sovereignty disputes, and balancing relations with major powers in the Indo-Pacific remain persistent issues.

**Policy Implications:** The findings emphasize the importance of sustaining Indonesia's commitment to maritime diplomacy as a cornerstone of its foreign policy. Enhancing institutional coordination and ensuring adequate resource allocation are critical to overcoming existing challenges. Indonesia's ability to navigate the complexities of regional and global maritime dynamics will determine its long-term success as a Global Maritime Fulcrum.

Future recommendations emphasize enhancing regional cooperation within ASEAN and IORA to ensure the effective implementation of maritime initiatives and foster partnerships in addressing transnational issues. Strengthening Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) through investments in advanced surveillance and enforcement technologies is essential for monitoring Indonesia's vast maritime territories and mitigating security threats. Multilateral engagement should be intensified to influence global maritime governance frameworks, aligning international norms with Indonesia's strategic priorities. Promoting maritime education and research by establishing specialized institutions will build expertise in governance and resource management, ensuring a skilled workforce. Additionally, fostering public-private partnerships can accelerate the development of maritime infrastructure and enhance economic sustainability. Future research should examine Indonesia's maritime diplomacy amid evolving geopolitical dynamics, such as China's maritime influence and US-China competition. At the same time, comparative studies on other archipelagic states' strategies could offer valuable lessons for refining Indonesia's policies.

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