

**INTERNATIONAL FLEET REVIEW (IFR) SERIES****India and Indonesia: Translating Strategic Convergence into Maritime Cooperation****Author:** Premesha Saha\***Date:** 29 January 2016**Background**

Geographic proximity, cultural similarities, anti-colonialism and the spirit of Afro-Asian solidarity have been the guiding pillars of India-Indonesia relationship. This was seen in the first Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung in 1955 convened by the two countries. The similar ideologies of the two countries towards non-alignment, Panchsheel (Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence) led to India and Indonesia emerging as 'natural partners' from the 1940's to the early 1950's period.<sup>1</sup> But over time the two countries drifted away. This was due to the difference in opinion between the leaders of the countries, former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and former President Sukarno. This difference was primarily on the nature and future role of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and also on the perception about China.<sup>2</sup> Though the relationship improved for some time under the leadership of President Suharto, but with the advent of the Cold War, India-Indonesia relations again hit a low. The growing Indo-Soviet friendship was conceived by Indonesia as a shift in India's attitude from non-alignment. It was the 1986 visit to Jakarta by the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi that addressed Indonesian concerns about the alignment of India to a certain extent.<sup>3</sup>

The end of the Cold War and the change in the security dynamics in Southeast Asia with the withdrawal of the US forces in 1992 acted as a catalyst in India-Indonesia relations. Further the relationship improved with the introduction of India's 'Look East' policy in 1991 under the former Prime Minister of India, P.V. Narsimha Rao. India also helped Indonesia during the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis. The fact that India's relation with Indonesia was on an upswing was proven when India was made the Sectoral Dialogue Partner of the ASEAN in 1992.<sup>4</sup>

After the initiation of the ‘Look East’ policy in 1991 India-Indonesia relations have matured. The economic and trade relations have been deepening. There has been an increase in the number of ministerial and high level visits. Even the defence relationship has strengthened, as was seen with the signing of the Defence Cooperation Agreement in 2001.<sup>5</sup> Though the course of the relations have seen periods of highs and lows, but the converging interests has seen both the countries coming together as strategic partners. The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement of 2005 is a case in point.

One aspect which remains less researched by the scholars as well as underexplored by the two countries is cooperation in the maritime domain. The tumultuous journey of India-Indonesia has acted as a stumbling block in the road to greater maritime cooperation between Indonesia and India.

In the above context, this article will explore the facet of maritime cooperation in India-Indonesia relations. It will analyse firstly, the need for maritime cooperation, secondly the course of maritime cooperation and finally will chalk out the avenues of maritime cooperation.



Figure 1: Map showing the geographical proximity of India and Indonesia

## **The Need for India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation**

As shown in Figure 1, strategically, Indonesia has a common maritime boundary with India. The Aceh province of Indonesia is barely 162 kilometres (km) from Indira Point, the southern-most tip of the Andaman and Nicobar island chain in the Bay of Bengal. <sup>6</sup> India and Indonesia have also successfully settled their maritime boundary delimitation issue.<sup>7</sup> Indonesia is located at the cross-roads of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. The Indonesian archipelago stretches from the tip of the Andaman Sea, through the Strait of Malacca to the South China Sea, and further, past the Java and Banda Sea to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>8</sup> The Indian peninsula juts out over 1000 miles into the depths of the Indian Ocean, and the Andaman and Nicobar islands chain sits squarely between the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea.<sup>9</sup>

The most strategic and important chokepoints like the Strait of Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, Makassar straits pass through the Indonesian archipelago, making it a pivotal player in global shipping.<sup>10</sup> These straits are also the means of entry and exit to the Indian Ocean. The Strait of Malacca is a major transit point between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans.<sup>11</sup> The Strait of Malacca is very strategic for India as about 40 per cent of India's imports come through this strait.<sup>12</sup> Indonesia's Aceh province lies adjacent to the Strait of Malacca and till before the 2005 Helsinki Peace Accord<sup>13</sup> was under the grapple of extremist elements. These extremist elements were responsible for piracy in the Strait of Malacca. Though after the peace accord this crisis has to some extent been diluted, caution in this region should be exercised.

Global attention is shifting from the West to the East. The sea is also becoming an arena where all the global politics is being played out in the twenty first century. Therefore, the security of the Indo-Pacific region, and increasingly the Indian Ocean has become an important concern for the Indian Ocean littorals and in this regard cooperation between littorals is the key. Despite being maritime countries, both the countries have for long possessed an 'inward looking mindset'. After independence both countries were engaged in shaking off the shackles of the colonial legacy. In this sense, the 'mental map' of the two countries towards maritime security can be said to have been very similar in the past.<sup>14</sup> Not just in the past, even in the present times India and Indonesia is seen to share a similar mindset when it comes to 'matters maritime'. For instance, both the countries desire to become credible maritime players in the Indo-Pacific region. India and Indonesia also have a similar stand on the South China Sea dispute. China's nine dashed line encloses Indonesia's Natuna Islands. This is a cause of concern for Indonesia. However, both maintain that the South China Sea dispute should be settled peacefully in accordance with international law.

Therefore, it will be to the benefit of both countries to identify these converging interests and embark on the road to greater maritime cooperation.

## **The Course of the Maritime Cooperation**

Though India-Indonesia maritime cooperation remains under explored, it will not be fair to say that maritime cooperation between the two has been totally non-existent. The Indian and the Indonesian navy signed the first security agreement in 1958. “The Naval agreement provided for cross attachment of naval officers, training exercises, and bilateral visits”.<sup>15</sup> This was followed by the first joint naval exercise of the Indian navy and the Indonesian navy held in July 1960.<sup>16</sup> Through the 1960s and 1970’s India and Indonesia were committed to limit the influence of western powers in the Indian Ocean. This was due to their non-aligned mindset during that time. This had resulted in them co-sponsoring the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace Proposal (IOZOP), though this did not materialize in the future. Thereafter, India and Indonesia undertook bilateral naval exercises off Surabaya in 1989 and in the Andaman Sea in 1991.<sup>17</sup>

The Indian Navy participated in the 1995 Jakarta International Fleet Review, marking fifty years of Indonesian independence. The Indonesian and Indian navies have conducted coordinated maritime patrols at their common maritime border located at the northern entrance of the Strait of Malacca, also known as the ‘Six-Degree Channel’. Beginning in 2002, India-Indonesia has been conducting Coordinated Patrols (Ind-Indo CORPAT) to ensure good order at sea. Jakarta also views the establishment of the Indian Integrated Andaman and Nicobar Islands Command in a positive light. This could contribute to greater monitoring of the northern approaches to the Strait, provide prompt assistance when needed, increase bilateral activities, like combined exercises and patrols, with the Indonesian Western Fleet Command. Indonesia also participates in India-led multilateral naval exercises, such as MILAN and SAREX exercises, and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). In the aftermath of the 2004 Tsunami, Jakarta highly appreciated the Indian Navy’s Operation Gambhir for humanitarian assistance in January 2005. Many Indian ships were involved in the Operation, for instance food and medical supplies were sent to Indonesia through the hospital ship INS Nirupak and the corvette INS Khukri.<sup>18</sup>

## **The Road Ahead**

Indonesia’s President, Joko Widodo (Jokowi) in his election manifesto unveiled his vision for Indonesia as a ‘Global Maritime Fulcrum’ (GMF). The underlying vision of the GMF is to develop Indonesia as a maritime power in the Indo-Pacific region (PACINDO). Jokowi, promised in his election manifesto in May 2014 to:

- a) Focus on strengthening Indonesia’s maritime security,

b) Expand the canvas of regional diplomacy to cover the entire region of the Indo-Pacific, and

c) project the Indonesian navy as a respected regional maritime power in East Asia.<sup>19</sup> These goals are proposed to be achieved through the development of the Indonesian navy and the building of Indonesia's port infrastructure to facilitate maritime trade and for the overall development of the Indonesian archipelago.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, India can invest in the development of Indonesia's port infrastructure.

The first pillar of Jokowi's GMF vision is to revive Indonesia's maritime culture. India has also launched its 'Project Mausam: Maritime Routes and Cultural Landscapes across the Indian Ocean'. It is a "transnational initiative meant to revive its ancient maritime routes and cultural linkages with the countries in the region."<sup>21</sup> This project is aimed to explore the vast and diverse Indian Ocean Region (IOR) extending from East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka to the Southeast Asian archipelago.<sup>22</sup> In this regard Indonesia will be an important player in this project, and in turn India will also help Jokowi in achieving the first pillar of his GMF vision.

Indonesia has a huge archipelagic coastline which it needs to monitor. Though India and Indonesia engage in coordinated patrols, the Ind-Indo CORPAT, but there are other domains of capacity building where India can contribute. As mentioned earlier, Jokowi's vision for Indonesia is not just limited to providing maritime security, but also to transform Indonesia into a maritime power. For achieving this, Jokowi has laid down a two-fold approach- firstly, to increase the domestic defense budget and to attract foreign investment. He has shown his willingness to work towards strengthening defence cooperation with major powers for strengthening Indonesia's navy.<sup>23</sup> Jokowi also plans to continue with the last President Susilo Yudhoyono's initiative of the Minimum Essential Forces (MEF).<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Indonesia will need to cooperate with countries on naval technology transfer. The progress on cooperation in naval technology transfer between India and Indonesia, has been very slow. For instance, Indonesia is still seeking to purchase the Indo-Russia jointly developed anti-ship supersonic missile, Brahmos.<sup>25</sup> Indian ship building companies can enter into joint ventures with the Indonesian naval shipbuilders. According to a recent report in the IHS Jane's, India is willing to provide patrol vessels to Indonesia, expanding an existing commercial agreement covering naval systems between Indonesian and Indian shipbuilders, Pipavav Defense and PT PAL, and enhancing cooperation in military aerospace programs between PT Dirgantara of Indonesia and Hindustan Aeronautics of India. <sup>26</sup>

The second Trilateral Dialogue on the Indian Ocean (TDIO) involving India, Australia and Indonesia took place at Canberra in September 2014. The TDIO

dialogue focussed on the theme of ‘Role of Major Powers and Strategic Stability in the Indian Ocean’. All three countries realize the importance of the Indian Ocean and the need for maintaining stability and “dynamic equilibrium in the region”.<sup>27</sup> India, Australia and Indonesia can also co-opt other countries in this dialogue to meet the goals set forth in this trilateral dialogue, since maritime security of such a vast and diverse region like the IOR cannot be achieved by engaging in dialogue with just two littorals. Similarly, India can involve other littorals including Indonesia in the trilateral dialogue on maritime security which it conducts with Sri Lanka and Maldives.<sup>28</sup>

Another platform of cooperation is the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). India and Indonesia have interacted and cooperated actively through this platform. Indonesia has assumed the role of the chair for the next two years (2015-2017). Indonesia will look to further the progress made during India’s tenure as chair of the IORA (2011-2013), as was seen in the 2011 Bengaluru Communique maritime security was added as one of the core priority areas of the IORA.

## **Conclusion**

There is still scope and need to further enhance the maritime cooperation between India and Indonesia. It is true that they had some diverging views during much of the Cold War period, but they continue to have shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region. The emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a key geo-strategic construct has given Indonesia increased importance for its strategic location and rising profile. This calls for India to make Indonesia an important actor in her Act East Policy. It is time for both the countries to translate their strategic interests into greater maritime cooperation. In this regard, the upcoming International Fleet Review to be held at Vishakhapatnam in February 2016, where the Indonesian navy will also be participating will act as an enabler for further maritime cooperation.

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## Notes and References

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<sup>2</sup>Ganganath Jha, "A Brief Survey of India-Indonesia Relations", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 17(4) (1996): 390.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto "Indonesia and India: Towards a Convergent Mandala", *India Review*, 12(3) (2013): 218.

<sup>6</sup>Pankaj K. Jha (2008), "India-Indonesia: Emerging Strategic Confluence in the Indian Ocean Region", n.1. , p.440.

<sup>7</sup>The Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia relating to the Delimitation of the Continental Shelf Boundary between the two Countries of 8 August 1974 (See, Delimitation of the Continental Shelf Boundary between the two Countries" 8 August 1974. <http://www.un.org/Depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/TREATIES/IND-IDN1974CS.PDF>)

Also, Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia on the Extension of the 1974 Continental Shelf Boundary between the two Countries in the Andaman Sea and the Indian Ocean of 14 January 1977 (See, <http://www.un.org/Depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/TREATIES/IND-IDN1977CS.PDF>)

<sup>8</sup>Jennifer McArdle, "Wading out to Sea: The Evolution of India and Indonesia's Naval Mindset Towards Multilateralism", *ORF Occasional Paper*, 34 (2012):7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto (2013), "Indonesia and India: Towards a Convergent Mandala", n.5. , p. 209.

<sup>11</sup> David Brewster, "The Relationship between India and Indonesia", *Asian Survey*, 51(2) (2011): 227.

<sup>12</sup>Vithiyapathi. P, "India's Strategic Dimensions in the Malacca Strait", <http://www.c3sindia.org/military/4901>, (accessed 10 January 2015)

<sup>13</sup> On August 15, 2005, in Helsinki, Finland, representatives of the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka; GAM) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aiming to end the conflict in Aceh, Indonesia's westernmost province and the site of an armed insurgency that has operated at varying levels of intensity since 1976.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. , p.2.

<sup>15</sup>Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto (2013), "Indonesia and India: Towards a Convergent Mandala", n.5. , p. 215.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> David Brewster (2011), "The Relationship between India and Indonesia", n.11, P.224.

<sup>18</sup>Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto (2013), "Indonesia and India: Towards a Convergent Mandala", n.5. , p.p. 218-219.

<sup>19</sup>Jalan Perubahan Untuk Indonesia Yang Berdaulat, Mandiri Dan Berkepribadian, "Visi Misi, Dan Program AKSI" <https://translate.google.co.in/translate?hl=en&sl=id&u=http://efekjokowi.com/visi-misi2.html&prev=search> (accessed 8 August 2015)

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<sup>20</sup>Chinyong Liow and Vibhanshu Shekhar, 'Indonesia as a Maritime Power: Jokowi's Vision, Strategies and Obstacles Ahead', <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2014/11/indonesia-maritime-liow-shekhar>, (accessed 10 November 2015).

<sup>21</sup>Sachin Parashar, 'Narendra Modi's 'Mausam' manoeuvre to check China's maritime might', <http://m.timesofindia.com/india/Narendra-Modis-Mausam-manoevre-to-check-Chinas-maritime-might/articleshow/42562085.cms>, (accessed 10 January 2015)

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Chinyong Liow and Vibhanshu Shekhar, 'Indonesia as a Maritime Power: Jokowi's Vision, Strategies and Obstacles Ahead', <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2014/11/indonesia-maritime-liow-shekhar>, (accessed 10 November 2015).

<sup>24</sup>In 2005, under the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), the Indonesian government adopted the Minimum Essential Force (MEF) – a twenty-year plan (2005-2024) that sets forth a military modernization agenda, with a special emphasis on the modernization of the Indonesian navy and air force. In the context of naval build up, the MEF goal is to develop by 2020 a five-fleet force totalling 274 ships with striking, patrolling and supporting capabilities. The plan involves weapons procurement, development of an indigenous defense industry and the revamping of defense research facilities.

<sup>25</sup>Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto (2013), "Indonesia and India: Towards a Convergent Mandala", n.5. , p.219.

<sup>26</sup>Prashanth Parameswaran , "India, Indonesia to Cooperate on Maritime Security, Defense Procurement", The Diplomat, August 14 2015. <http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/india-indonesia-to-cooperate-on-maritime-security-defense-procurement/> (accessed 30 November 2015)

<sup>27</sup> Summary Discussions at "Second Australia-India-Indonesia Trilateral Dialogue on the Indian Ocean (TDIO-II), 10 September 2014. [http://www.aspi.org.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/23823/2<sup>nd</sup>-TDIO-Summary-of-Discussions.pdf](http://www.aspi.org.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/23823/2<sup>nd</sup>-TDIO-Summary-of-Discussions.pdf) (accessed 30 November 2015)

<sup>28</sup>India hosted the third NSA-level Trilateral Meeting on Maritime Security Cooperation between Maldives, Sri Lanka and India on 6 March 2014 in New Delhi. India, Sri Lanka and Maldives launched the Trilateral Cooperation in Maritime Security in October 2011 at the first NSA-level Trilateral Meeting on Maritime Security Cooperation in Maldives. At the second meeting in Colombo in July 2013, the three countries agreed on a roadmap for cooperation in maritime security, comprising the following three categories of activities:

1. Initiatives to enhance Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) through access to systems run under the aegis of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), such as Long Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT) services and sharing of Automatic Identification System (AIS) data;
2. Training and capacity building initiatives in areas of MDA, Search and Rescue, and Oil Pollution Response; and
3. Joint activities including trilateral exercises, maintaining lines of communication on illegal maritime activities, formulation of marine oil pollution response contingency plans and cooperation in legal and policy issues related to piracy. (See, <http://www.mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?23037/NSA+level+meeting+on+trilateral+Maritime+Security+Cooperation+between+India+Sri+Lanka+and+Maldives>)