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Maritime Security Agencies in Indonesia: More Not Merrier

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Synopsis

Indonesia's maritime security agencies are beset with coordination problems. Instead of adding more agencies, the solution should be a merged institution supported by firm leadership and a strong legal mandate.

Commentary

THE INDONESIAN Navy (TNI-AL) is over-stretched and under-resourced as the sole institution responsible for the security of Indonesia's six million square kilometres of maritime jurisdiction. The government has therefore established the Maritime Security Coordinating Board (Badan Koordinasi Keamanan Laut, Bakorkamla) to coordinate the activities of no fewer than 12 national agencies, or "stakeholders" related to maritime security affairs.

However, as each agency often tends to go its own way regardless of Bakorkamla's coordinating role, and given the multifaceted interests of the 12 agencies, the idea of Bakorkamla acting as a coordinating agency seems novel in Indonesia. Another instance is the Indonesian Sea and Coast Guard (ISCG) mandated by the 2008 National Law No. 17 on Shipping, which has yet to be established as a single institution responsible for maritime law enforcement in Indonesian waters.

Maritime security agencies

The TNI-AL is primarily responsible for the protection of Indonesian maritime sovereignty, particularly in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), while the National Police Marine Division is in charge of law enforcement in territorial seas. The Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, Ministry of Transportation's Sea and Coast Guard Directorate, Finance Ministry's Customs and Excise Directorate General are tasked with marine environmental protection, navigational safety, port security and tax revenue, respectively.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Judicial and Security Affairs (Menkopolhukam), Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Intelligence Agency, Indonesian National Defence Forces Headquarters (Mabes TNI), and Attorney General's Office only maintain information coordination without committing any assets to sea.

However, Bakorkamla itself is beset with coordination problems due to parochial institutional interests, competition for resources, slow legal enforcement, as well as a lack of firm leadership. Thus the inter-agency

relationship boils down to the survival of the fittest, with each agency vying for more authority, resources, and privileges from the government.

Inter-agency competition

Currently, Bakorkamla's authority is often bypassed in favour of the institutional interests of those agencies which it is supposed to coordinate. While unity of purpose seems to be recognised at the strategic level, operational level coordination on the ground and at sea is patchy at best. For example, Bakorkamla often finds it difficult to harmonise the standard operational procedures (SOP) of the various agencies, utilise their sea assets under one command, pool resources together, as well as assign missions and objectives to its stakeholders. In reality, each agency tends to go its own way.

At the same time, the institutional "turf battle" rages on over competition for resources. It has been an open secret that Bakorkamla is under-funded, under-equipped, and under-staffed to conduct its operations. Currently, it only has around 100 staff for the entire archipelago, although in theory, it could "borrow" staff from the stakeholders. Bakorkamla's main office or Headquarters in Central Jakarta is a leased TNI-AL building - barely enough to accommodate its entire staff and coordinate operations.

Still, some measures have been taken to improve Bakorkamla's capacity. In 2010, it established two Maritime Regional Control Centres (MRCC) and 12 Regional Control Centres (RCC) across the archipelago. It will also receive two offshore patrol vessels (OPV), the KAMLA-4801 and KAMLA-4802 - the largest vessels Bakorkamla has ever operated, besides the 8 Bimaran and 10 rigid inflatable boats it has been operating thus far.

The more the merrier?

Part of the problem in creating a single maritime security institution stems from, and revolves around, vested institutional interests to create the ISCG from within the existing ministries. The 2008 Law only mentions that the ISCG should be responsible to the President and put under the operational supervision of a ministry.

The establishment of the Sea and Coast Guard Unit (Kesatuan Penjaga Laut dan Pantai, KPLP) under the Ministry of Transportation's Sea and Coast Guard Directorate, for instance has intensified the competition with, and within, Bakorkamla. The Transport Ministry interprets the 2008 Law as having the KPLP status elevated to the ISCG. The idea was for the KPLP to be put directly under the President's office while the Transport Ministry would supervise its daily operations. Feeling itself being subordinated by its own stakeholder, Bakorkamla rebuffed this and instead submitted its rival concept of Badan Keamanan Laut (Bakamla), also reporting to the President but within the operational supervision of the Menkopohukam.

In any case, the grey areas of responsibility between KPLP and Bakorkamla (and others) are wide enough to create tussles. Both agencies are vying to be acknowledged and represented as Indonesia's 'genuine' coast guard. If left protracted, such a competition could lead to further inefficiency in resource allocation and compromise professionalism.

Another problem is a lack of firm leadership. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has yet to make a decision in the form of a Governmental Decree (Peraturan Pemerintah, PP) as to which ministry and authority the ISCG shall be based upon. As the country's highest executive authority, the President should take a firm decision and act to merge the KPLP and Bakorkamla into a single agency, designate a ministry to be responsible for its operational supervision, and if necessary, press for reforms in the existing laws and regulations to accommodate the new changes.

The establishment of ISCG would also necessitate curbing similar roles performed by other institutions. Institutional resistance, or even inertia, would predictably be fierce. The result, however, could be equally rewarding for all. The establishment of a single Coast Guard agency could tremendously increase the efficiency of patrolling Indonesian territorial waters, while enabling the TNI-AL to devote its attention and resources to the security of Indonesia's EEZ and sea lanes.

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