

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND INDONESIA'S INTERNATIONAL POSTURE: CONSTRAINTS AND POSSIBILITIES

**Rizal SUKMA
CSIS, Jakarta**

**Indonesia Update, Canberra
30 September – 1 October 2011**





Introduction (1)

- Since 2003, after a brief period of inward-looking, Indonesia once again tried to regain appropriate place in the regional and international arena by:
 - playing a more active role in Southeast Asia,
 - projecting its international image as the world's third largest democracy and the largest moderate Muslim majority country, and
 - positioning itself as a “bridge-builder” and “problem-solver” in the wider global community.



Introduction (2)

- The paper examines the extent to which such Indonesia's international posture has been subject to both facilitating and restraining effects of domestic political realities at home
- Structure of the Paper:
 1. New Activism in Foreign Policy
 2. Effects of Domestic Politics
 3. Strategic Re-positioning in East Asia



New Activism in Foreign Policy (1)

- Sources of New Confidence – Indonesia as a normal country
 1. two relatively peaceful democratic elections (1999 and 2004),
 2. the peaceful resolution of communal violent and secessionist conflicts (especially in Aceh),
 3. military's withdrawal of politics,
 4. gradual economic recovery,
 5. the introduction of genuine multi-party system,
 6. the devolution of power from the central government to the region, and
 7. the existence of vibrant civil society groups, and (8) greater respect for freedom of speech and free media.



New Activism in Foreign Policy (2)

- The new activism in Indonesia's foreign policy has been reflected in four areas:
 1. Restoring international image: Islam and democracy
 2. an active role in ASEAN
 3. Greater role in East Asia
 4. A global aspiration as a bridge-builder: Muslim world, G-20



Effects of Domestic Politics

- Democracy
- Islam
- Nationalism
- Domestic Weaknesses



Democracy and Foreign Policy

- Support for the inclusion of democratic values and democracy-projection agenda into foreign policy
- Complex policy-making environment: many actors
- Weak democratic credential
- Open political system has allowed different voices to affect the conduct of diplomacy and foreign relations
- Democracy and domestic political purposes



Islam and Foreign Policy

- Islam as an element of new identity
- Delicate balancing act: co-religionist demands versus rational foreign policy priorities
- Domestic reality as a constraint
- Role of Islam in FP should not be exaggerated. Issues such as Rohingya, Xinjiang, Patani, are still at the margin



Nationalism

- The display of nationalist sentiments in the post-*reformasi* era is no longer monopolised by the government. It limits the range of FP choices and defined the course of action that the government can take.
- It continues to reflect the confluence of internal insecurity, suspicions of external powers, the growing confidence over domestic situation, and a sense of regional entitlement.
- The most striking expression of nationalism in foreign policy has been evident in Indonesia's acute sensitivity to the question of territorial integrity and the preservation of the country's political and economic autonomy in the international arena.
- Growing role played by the DPR in ensuring that the conduct of foreign policy should serve first and foremost Indonesia's national interests.



Domestic Weaknesses and Global Aspiration

- What it aspires to do?:
 1. Bridge between Muslim world and the West
 2. Bridge at the G-20
 3. Bridge between ASEAN and G-20
 4. Champion on Climate Change
- But, global aspiration is constrained by a host of domestic problems
- The records suggest that Indonesia's influence in the global arena remains marginal



Strategic Re-positioning in East Asia (1)

- A new dilemma: ASEAN is too small, but global politics is too big. So, what to do?
- The need to find a new locus to link the two, and consolidating its place in the wider East Asian region naturally provides Indonesia with such a locus.
- Expanding foreign policy *mandala* (theatre) from SEA to East Asia



Strategic Re-positioning in East Asia (2)

- Key Indonesia's initiatives:

1. shaping the emerging regional architecture in the region by ensuring ASEAN's centrality while encouraging greater participation by other major and regional powers in the regional processes → the EAS
2. Balancing multilateralism with the need to expand and deepen strategic bilateral relationship with all major powers (the US, China, Japan, and India) and regional middle powers (Australia and South Korea).
3. Strengthen ASEAN's link with the G-20
4. Steps to lay the foundation for ASEAN to play a bigger role in the community of nations.



- Indonesia's strategic re-positioning in East Asia would allow it to balance the commitment to ASEAN on the one hand while increasing its selective participation in the global arena on the other.
- Indonesia's foreign policy activism, and its desire to play a meaningful and effective global role, would have a greater chance of success if it is pursued by making East Asia as the core *mandala* of Indonesia's international role. Any other ambition beyond that would have to wait until it manages to eradicate the constraining effects of domestic politics.