Indonesia’s Rising Regional and Global Profile: Does Size Really Matter?

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This paper seeks to challenge the view that Indonesia’s geographical and population size account for its rising regional and global profile. Instead, it makes three inter-related arguments. First, the manifestations of Indonesia’s foreign policy and global profile have always been based on its ability to harness the country’s normative and moral voice. Second, while democratization since 1998 has allowed Indonesia to restore its reputation in world affairs and provided it with a new source of “soft power”, it has also complicated foreign policy-making. Third, Indonesia’s large geographical size and population have been a source of persistent internal security threats, and because the government has been unable to meet national defence requirements, the growth in its defence diplomacy activities reflect the country’s continuing strategic weakness rather than its strength.

Keywords: Indonesia, foreign policy, defence diplomacy, strategic weakness.

Scholars have long regarded Indonesia as among the world’s most important regional powers and a “pivotal” one at that. Indeed, in the decades following independence in 1945, many Indonesian leaders felt that the country’s size, resources and revolutionary history entitled Jakarta to a leadership role in Southeast Asia. While the subsequent history of the country’s trajectory in world affairs has not always reflected such self-conceptions, many now argue that Indonesia’s
regional and global profile is rising. Since 2003, Indonesia has been the driving force behind political and security community building in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), even as it strengthens bilateral partnerships with major powers such as the United States, Russia, India, China and Australia. Indonesia has also been actively engaged on many global issues such as climate change and been an ardent supporter of global institutions including the G-20 and the UN Security Council. Indonesia’s economic growth rates in recent years of between 4 to 6 per cent annually have also been impressive, especially given the difficulties faced by other countries during the global financial crisis. Finally, the consolidation of democracy has increased domestic resilience and earned the country international approbation.

This turn of events is quite remarkable given that a little over a decade ago some analysts were predicting the “Balkanization” of Indonesia following a series of economic and political crises which accompanied the fall of President Soeharto, including an upsurge in separatist activity and the violent separation of East Timor in 1999. While it is clearly difficult to isolate the single most important reason behind Indonesia’s recovery and increasing regional and global profile, some observers have cited the country’s land and population size as providing it with the capital to play a regional and even global leadership role. Indonesia is not only the largest country in Southeast Asia in terms of land size and population, but also the world’s largest archipelagic state and is rich in natural resources. An economist at Morgan Stanley has noted that together with improved government finances and political stability, the “natural advantage from demography and commodity resources is likely to unleash Indonesia’s growth potential”.

This line of reasoning seems to echo the Realist school of International Relations which favours material factors — such as economy, natural resources, population size and geography — as the primary indicators of national power. As such, when a country such as Indonesia possesses these material factors, and if it can manage its domestic political affairs and maintain cohesion, its rise is more likely to occur. Thus, some would argue that Indonesia’s rising profile is due to its potential material powers, mainly, though not exclusively, its size. Although this line of reasoning can be persuasive, as this paper seeks to demonstrate, it only tells half the story. Indonesia’s complex history, domestic political system and threat perceptions suggests that what is required is a more nuanced assessment of the country’s rising regional and global profile.
Understanding Indonesia as a rising power is important because it is one of Southeast Asia’s key leaders and is also an active participant in Asia’s emerging regional security architecture. At the theoretical level, explaining why rising powers rise the way they do is also significant if we are to understand the future of regional stability and order. While there is no commonly accepted definition of “power” in International Relations — let alone what definitively constitutes a rising power⁸ — there seems to be several “middle powers”, such as Turkey, South Africa, Brazil and Indonesia that not only possess growing economic and political might, but also have the potential as well as aspiration to challenge the legitimacy of the post-Second World War order. Some of these countries have been pushing for more pluralist conceptions of global architecture in various international forums and have been deepening relations between and among themselves, perhaps even with a view to creating a bloc of their own.⁹

However, this paper does not seek to elaborate on the implications of rising powers such as Indonesia for regional stability and global order, or whether or not Indonesia has truly risen. Instead, it accepts the emerging consensus among scholars and observers that Indonesia’s regional and global profile has been on the rise in recent years and seeks to provide a more nuanced assessment behind the country’s rise. It also aims to challenge the prevailing view that “size matters” in explaining Indonesia’s foreign policy outlook and regional and global leadership. Using Indonesia’s rising regional and global security profile as a case study, it argues instead that normative values, domestic politics and its strategic environment better explain Indonesia’s current profile in regional and global affairs. Specifically, this paper submits three inter-related arguments.

First, despite its “material sources of power” (especially its large land and population size), the manifestations of Indonesia’s foreign policy and regional and global profile have always been based on its ability to harness the country’s normative and moral authority in global affairs, especially in international institutions. This is reflected in both the country’s “independent and active” foreign policy doctrine as well as the continued focus on addressing domestic problems. Second, democratization since 1998 has created two paradoxical trends. On the one hand, Indonesia’s consolidation of democracy has allowed it to regain its reputation in world affairs and provided it with a new source of “soft power”. On the other hand, democracy has also complicated foreign policy-making because of the proliferation of interested parties and stakeholders, and the
importance of public opinion. Under the image-conscious presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, these factors obfuscate the country’s foreign policy coherence and rationality.

Finally, instead of boosting the country’s regional and global profile, Indonesia’s large geographical space and population have been a source of persistent internal security threats. And as the government has been unable to meet national defence requirements, Indonesia’s growing defence diplomatic activities may be more a reflection of the country’s continuing strategic weakness rather than its strength. In International Relations parlance, this is Indonesia’s own version of “soft balancing” — as a recovering power, not necessarily a rising one. While these arguments are not entirely novel in themselves — scholars of Third World countries in the 1960s made similar claims — it seeks to highlight the persistence of Indonesia’s foreign policy principles and strategies.

Indonesia’s Foreign Policy: Why Norms (Still) Matter

Observers of Indonesia often cite the country’s size as among the primary modalities for its regional and global role. In 2009, the population of Indonesia stood at 230 million (the fourth largest in the world). The country’s land area amounts to 1.9 million square kilometres (placing it 16th in the world in terms of land mass). At over 18,000 islands, the Indonesian archipelago is the largest in the world, covering an area of 2.8 million square kilometres, expanding to 7.9 million square kilometres including its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Indonesia has the world’s largest Muslim population, though it is not an Islamic theocratic state. Indonesia also occupies a geo-strategically important location between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, forming a bridge between Asia and Australia and controlling strategic sea lanes of communications vital to military and commercial activities between the Pacific Basin, Europe, East Asia, the Middle East and South Asia. Indonesia also has sovereign rights in the Straits of Malacca, one of the world’s busiest waterways.

Since the 1940s, successive Indonesian foreign policy-makers, political elites and observers have invoked these material assets as evidence that Indonesia is entitled to play the role of a regional leader and global player. Observers of contemporary Indonesia have made similar assumptions about Indonesia’s foreign policy and global status. Anthony Smith, for instance, has argued that Indonesia’s stature as a regional and global leader “has hitherto been determined by its large population, geographical position, and its economic
potential." John Haseman has posited that Indonesia’s large and predominantly moderate Muslim population, strategic location and abundant resources make it a regional power of great importance to the United States. Conversely, however, these material assets, when coupled with Indonesia’s aggressive policies in the past (such as during Konfrontasi in the 1960s and the 1975 invasion of East Timor), have created unease among its neighbours.

These concerns notwithstanding, when placed within the overall historical trajectory of Indonesia’s foreign policy, it appears that instead of hard realpolitik based on material powers, international and regional institutions dominate the country’s foreign policy, especially since it rejoined the UN in 1966 and became a founding member of ASEAN in 1967. Membership of ASEAN has been particularly important, and one of the constant themes in the foreign ministry’s pronouncements has been that ASEAN is the “cornerstone” of Indonesia’s foreign policy. In addition, many of Indonesia’s major regional and global achievements are often executed or proposed through various international institutions such as the UN, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) process, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and others. In the main, foreign policy-makers seem to echo neo-liberal institutionalists who posit that international institutions can serve the national interest in the pursuit of mutual gains.

In addition to its commitment to international institutions, Indonesia also continues to adhere to the principles of non-intervention, multilateralism and other norms that contribute to regional stability. In fact, Indonesia’s foreign policy officials often claim in private that while material achievements may not always be easily measured when it comes to the country’s foreign policy, they are proud that many of their efforts have generated new ideas and thinking on important regional and global affairs. These include, for example, the notion of “regional resilience” and “consensus building” that have for decades defined much of the security discourse in Southeast Asia. More recently, President Yudhoyono has suggested that Indonesia act as “a peace-maker, confidence-builder, problem-solver, and bridge-builder”. Following democratization in 1998, this role is believed to be achievable by “introducing and promoting new sketches of the country’s profile, portraying a democratic Indonesia, change, courage, and internationalism” which could result in “a greater international recognition of Indonesia’s capacity to solve acute international issues”.
It can be inferred that in the conduct of Indonesia’s foreign policy, much of the material assets that scholars believe to be important are seldom critical determinants. Instead, Indonesia’s regional and global profile seems to be reflective of its normative values, or, in the words of former Vice President Mohammad Hatta, its “moral force”.20 These normative values, enshrined and institutionalized since the 1940s, essentially stem from the “independent and active” doctrine, as well as Indonesia’s formative experiences in the struggle against colonialism.21 The “independent” component holds that Indonesia should chart its own course in foreign affairs independently of any external party, while the “active” part holds that the country should not sit idly by, but be actively involved in international affairs so as to shape the regional and global environment.

These normative foundations guided Indonesia throughout the Cold War and provided it with prestige and credibility, especially through membership of international institutions such as NAM and ASEAN. In practice, of course, we can argue that Indonesia was not so much neutral per se, but played off one superpower against the other. The practical manifestations notwithstanding, the “independent and active” doctrine suggests that while effectively grounded in the country’s national interest, Indonesian foreign policy should also be based on shared values and principles, reflecting the country’s unique historical, cultural and political experience.22 These values also reflect the country’s unchanging view of international relations, despite changes in political leadership, that world politics is seen as dominated by the large, developed nations which design institutions and act exclusively in their own self-interest.23 As such, Indonesia’s role is to actively and independently be the “benevolent expositor of peace and the interests of the developing world”.24

Therefore, the role of ideas and institutions in Indonesian foreign policy is not a new phenomenon. Most recently, the country has been expressing its assertiveness by debating novel ideas, crafting new images of democracy and gradually supporting manageable change in the regional and global environment. With regards to the latter, today Indonesia seeks to sustain a “dynamic equilibrium” among the regional and global powers to the benefit of all — a core tenet in the so-called “Natalegawa Doctrine”, named after Indonesia’s current foreign minister, Marty Natalegawa.25 However, as the following sections will show, while norms and values often underpin Indonesia’s foreign policy beliefs, the nature of domestic politics continues to play a significant role in shaping how those beliefs are manifested.
Democracy and Indonesia’s Foreign Policy: A Double-edged Sword?

The dramatic overhaul of Indonesia’s political system following the end of authoritarianism in 1998 and the introduction of genuine democracy has had profound implications for the country’s foreign policy. Generally, democratization changes the structures and actors involved in the process of foreign policy-making at two levels.26 At the national level, domestic constituencies pressure the government to adopt policies they favour; simultaneously, however, governmental actors seek power by building coalitions among these constituencies. At the international level, governmental actors seek to satisfy domestic pressures while limiting the harmful impact on foreign relations. While both authoritarian and democratic leaders need to play this two-level “game”, democratization increases the degree of pressure on decision-makers to do so, mainly because of the expansion of the number of actors involved and the role of public opinion.27

In terms of foreign policy therefore, democratization amplifies the nexus between internal pressures of domestic political legitimacy and coalition, with external pressures stemming from the international system and the need to maintain the country’s foreign relations.28 For Indonesia, democratization has significantly changed, though not fully replaced, the traditional “personalistic and presidential” nature of its foreign policy.29 Specifically, this materializes in the growing role and strength of the People’s Representative Council (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat or DPR), the national parliament, in foreign policy-making and decisions through its Commission 1 on Defence and Foreign Affairs. Constitutional amendments have empowered the DPR to endorse or reject presidential nominees for ambassadorial posts, conduct legal inquiries into the president’s foreign policy and ratify international agreements signed by the government. The refusal by the DPR to endorse and ratify the 2007 Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) between the governments of Indonesia and Singapore is a case in point.30 Also, while claiming to be more concerned with the “supporting infrastructure of foreign policy”, Commission 1 conducted “fit-and-proper tests” for more than 60 ambassadorial candidates between 1999 and 2004.31

This is a significant departure from the past, when the foreign policy-making process centred on presidential personalities and their interests. Yet, while in theory this strengthens the checks-and-balances mechanism of foreign policy, the growing role of parliament often obfuscates the coherence and pragmatism of the Foreign Ministry’s decisions. In mid-2007, for example, Commission 1 launched an official inquiry into the government’s decision to support UNSC Resolution...
1747 that expanded sanctions on Iran due to its nuclear programme. The inquiry embarrassed Indonesia as a UNSC member and undermined the government’s nuclear non-proliferation stance. To complicate matters, legislators have occasionally used foreign policy issues to attack the president without providing constructive suggestions to improve policy. Many legislators in charge of foreign affairs also often lack the necessary knowledge and expertise to make informed decisions.

In addition to the DPR’s role, the advent of democracy has also increased the importance of public opinion in foreign policy decision-making. In democracies, political leaders must justify their decisions in an accountable and transparent manner; poor foreign policy decisions made at the expense of the national or public interest can make re-election harder to achieve. In the case of Indonesia, however, under the image-conscious administration of President Yudhoyono, public opinion on foreign policy issues is only heeded when dealing with sensitive matters that could hurt his image, or when it could cost him domestic support.

However, despite these complications, the Foreign Ministry believes that democracy is a very important source of “soft power” that can enhance the country’s foreign policy and international image and contribute to regional stability. Indeed, over the past decade, many of the country’s major foreign policy initiatives have centred on democratic ideas, including the creation of the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC) and the Bali Democracy Forum (BDF). The first draft of the APSC (then still called the ASEAN Security Community proposal), which totalled more than 70 specific ideas actually called for the promotion of democracy and human rights, a commitment to free and regular elections, and the formation of open, tolerant societies. The BDF was meant as a forum to promote cooperation and further the spread of democracy and good governance in Asia.

This “democratic resurgence” also helped to win over the support of the United States, which would later cite the consolidation of democracy in Indonesia as among the reasons behind the normalization of military-to-military relations in 2005 and the US-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership Agreement in 2010. Some observers have argued that in view of Indonesia’s democratic credentials, it should be encouraged to take on a leadership role in the Muslim world. Arguably, however, this approach is misguided. For one thing, Indonesians are not comfortable injecting religion into foreign policy. And not only are they uneasy about the binary distinction between “radical” and “moderate” Muslims in world politics, they are also worried about potential resentment from the country’s domestic minorities. Moreover, it would be difficult for
Indonesia to play a leading role in the Muslim world when Middle Eastern countries do not necessarily “accept” Jakarta’s leadership.

In short, democratization in Indonesia has created two paradoxical trends in terms of the country’s rising regional and global profile. On the one hand, a consistent and coherent foreign policy is more difficult to achieve due to the growing complexity of foreign policy-making (especially the role of parliament and public opinion). But on the other hand, democracy provides Indonesia with an excellent window of opportunity to raise its regional and global profile.

Indonesia’s Enduring Strategic Weaknesses

Indonesia’s physical size, demographic plurality, socio-ethnic diversity and porous borders, as well as the nature of contending domestic political competition, have all been drivers of many of the country’s internal security threats and conflicts. While of course each conflict and security threat in the country’s history may be unique to specific political and socio-economic contexts, the perceptions of state security actors, primarily the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD), are generally quite similar. They believe that the internal challenges that threaten the country’s domestic stability and “unitary state” have always dominated Indonesia’s strategic and security environment and always will. A study conducted by the University of Indonesia, for example, concluded that out of 249 combat operations undertaken by the Indonesian military and police from 1945 to 2004, 67 per cent addressed internal security threats. As such, a sense of insecurity and internal weakness pervades strategic thinking among military planners. For instance, the dominance of the army in the TNI, and the expansion of its Territorial Command Structure (geared to maintain “territorial management” and ensure a web of control and surveillance all the way down to the village level across the country), is indicative of the military’s internal security mindset. This mindset has led the military to adopt an “offensive” posture when it comes to addressing internal threats, but a “defensive” posture when faced with external threats. The fact that the new State Defence Doctrine (issued in 2008) focuses largely on “non-military threats” such as ideology, politics, and socio-economic problems, further entrenches this mindset.

This sense of internal insecurity continues to influence defence and foreign policy-making today and is likely to do so for the foreseeable future. In a 2010 document published by the MoD outlining the country’s actual and potential threats over the next two
decades, internal security threats still featured prominently, though the scenarios also incorporated non-traditional security challenges such as climate change (see Table 1). Therefore, while formally the

### Table 1

**Indonesia’s Threat Overview and Projections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual Threats</th>
<th>Potential Threats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>Global warming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Separatism</td>
<td>Disruption of sea lane security</td>
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<tr>
<td>Border disputes and outer island</td>
<td>Environmental degradation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural disasters</td>
<td>Pandemics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illegal smuggling</td>
<td>Financial crisis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horizontal conflicts</td>
<td>Cyber crime</td>
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<tr>
<td>Energy scarcity</td>
<td>Foreign aggression</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Food and water crises</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Indonesia’s Threat Scenarios**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Scenario</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Foreign military power involved in local separatist movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Use of force in border conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Foreign presence combined with military presence in securing access to Indonesia’s energy resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Foreign military presence to fight terrorists within Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Foreign military presence in Indonesia’s Sea Lanes of Communication to secure economic routes</td>
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**Flash Point Zones**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Possible Scenario</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenarios 1, 2, and 3</td>
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<td>Scenarios 2, 3, and 4</td>
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<td>Scenarios 2 and 3</td>
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<td>Scenarios 2 and 4</td>
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<td>Scenario 5</td>
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<td>Scenario 4</td>
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<td>Scenarios 2 and 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenarios 1, 3, and 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenarios 1, 2, and 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenarios 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 5 along with illegal activities and environmental degradation</td>
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</table>

*Source: Adapted from Ministry of Defence, *Minimum Essential Force* (Jakarta: Ministry of Defence, 2010).*
TNI and MoD do not participate in the formulation of foreign policy, their views nevertheless help shape Indonesia’s foreign policy. And as we shall see in the following section, Indonesia’s rising regional and global security profile is also shaped by this perception of internal strategic weakness. This further confirms Franklin Weinstein’s assertion in the 1970s that perceptions of weakness shape Indonesia’s foreign policy to a large extent.  

Aside from this perceived internal weakness, the government and parliament have also been unable to fulfil the defence requirements as submitted by the MoD every year, although it should be noted that compared to a decade ago, Indonesia’s defence budget has more than doubled (see Figure 1). While clearly a significant improvement for the cash-strapped TNI — whose commercial units suffered heavy losses during the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis and is now officially barred from commercial activities — the armed forces’ funding requirements have never been fully met.

**Figure 1**

*Indonesia’s Defence Budget, 1998–2010*

(billion USD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Defence Budget (billion USD)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1.553</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2.53</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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</tbody>
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*Note:* Figures have not been adjusted for inflation.

Indeed, the defence budget has only provided approximately 30 to 40 per cent of TNI and MoD budgetary requests (see Figure 2). As a consequence, officials argue that as a result of such budgetary constraints, the overall operational readiness of the navy and air force only ranges from 40 to 65 per cent. It should be noted, however, that the MoD has not done a satisfactory job of publicly explaining in detail the basis and rationale of their budgetary requests each year.

In addition, as a percentage of the national budget and GDP, Indonesia’s defence budget is miniscule relative to the country’s size and security requirements (see Figure 3). Even when compared to other Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia’s defence budget is considered well below what it should be. Internal policy discussions and MoD publications, however, have stressed that in order for them to sufficiently have the financial support needed to procure new equipment and increase operational readiness, defence spending as a percentage of GDP should be raised from

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Figure 2

Indonesia’s Defence Gap
(Budget compared to requirements in billion USD)

the current 1 per cent or less to at least 3 to 4 per cent over the next decade.

From the preceding analysis two conclusions can be drawn. First, Indonesia’s land and population “size” as well as diversity actually perpetuates perceptions of internal threat within the defence and foreign policy establishment. Second, Indonesia’s defence spending is comparatively low for a country of its size and security requirements, which means non-military means are required to defend the country, such as diplomacy, which underlines the rationale behind Indonesia’s contribution to regional and global security. These traits underline the essence of Indonesia’s strategic weakness stemming from the persistence of internal security threats to the state and the inability of the military to cope with them. It should be pointed out, however, that following the separation of the National Police from the military in 1999, internal security threats have become the responsibility of the former, except for separatist insurgencies.
Indonesia’s Rising Security Profile: Killing Two Birds with One Stone?

Indonesia’s international security role can be viewed from two levels. At the global level, Indonesia seeks to adhere to its normative and historical commitments to actively contribute to world peace as enshrined in the 1945 Constitution. This is mainly achieved through its contributions to UN peacekeeping missions. In terms of missions and personnel contributions, Indonesia has been an active participant, sending a total of 88 contingents and missions between 1957 and 2008 (see Figure 4). While Indonesia’s participation in UN missions over the past five decades has not been consistent, since 2006 Jakarta has been determined to raise its profile in peacekeeping operations. In 2010, with 1,765 peacekeepers, Indonesia was among the top twenty contributors of uniformed personnel. This is a sharp increase since 2005 when it only ranked 47th in terms of military contributions. Among Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia claims to be the largest contributor to UN peacekeeping missions. It should be noted that in recent years, however, it has been the United States, primarily through the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), that has helped assist this effort, including $2 million to transport TNI

![Figure 4](image)

**Indonesia’s Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Missions, 1957–2008**

(Number of personnel)

*Source: Author’s dataset from UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Indonesian military documents.*
vehicles to Lebanon, and another $2.3 million to train Indonesian peacekeepers in 2009.43
As Chair of ASEAN in 2011, Indonesia has suggested it becomes the hub for a “network of peacekeeping centres” in Southeast Asia, as part of efforts to create an ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC). Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa has even stated that Indonesia’s ultimate goal is to become one of the ten biggest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations.44 Aside from troops, Indonesia also dispatched a warship in August 2010 to join the Maritime Task Force (MTF) of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), its second contribution since 2009. The plan to establish a Peacekeeping Training Centre in Sentul, West Java also appears to be progressing.
As noted earlier, Indonesia’s defence diplomacy activities are designed to compensate for its strategic weakness by enhancing regional trust-building and engaging major regional powers such as the United States, China, India and Australia. This is mainly achieved through regional multilateral institutions, multilateral and bilateral free trade agreements, bilateral strategic partnerships or security cooperation, as well as multilateral security cooperation. For the sake of analytical brevity and space, the following sections will only address Indonesia’s bilateral and multilateral defence diplomacy.

Bilateral Defence Diplomacy

Since the 1990s, militaries and their defence ministries all over the world have taken on a growing range of cooperative undertakings. Defence diplomacy — the peacetime use of armed forces as a tool of foreign and security policy — is among the primary activities in this domain.45 Defence diplomacy is also a process that may involve state officials (politicians, security personnel and intelligence services) as well as non-governmental organizations, think-tanks and civil society. This conception of defence diplomacy is broader than “military diplomacy” which focuses only on “the use of the military to advance diplomacy and its engagement in various security arrangements”.46 In the case of Indonesia, the TNI and MoD are generally the leading agencies, though there are cases where they have been “seconded” to foreign ministry officials. This reflects the crucial role of the military (which also dominates the MoD) in shaping Indonesia’s regional and global security profile.

Indonesia pursues three types of bilateral defence diplomacy: (1) implementing confidence building measures (CBMs), (2) activities
aimed at enhancing domestic defence capabilities, and (3) developing the country’s domestic defence industries. CBMs include state visits, dialogues and consultations, information sharing, strategic partnerships, officer exchanges and combined military exercises. Diplomacy to increase defence capabilities includes military assistance and weapons acquisitions. Diplomacy for defence industrial development generally includes technology transfer, R&D cooperation and joint ventures.

Between 2003 and 2008, Indonesia conducted 88 defence diplomacy activities (see Figure 5), the majority of which involved CBMs, signifying two main developments. First, Indonesia continues to believe in the utility of military diplomacy to strengthen regional security through the implementation of CBMs at a time when it is unable to fully safeguard the country’s security interests. Jakarta also seeks to develop a degree of comfort among its partners and engage potential rivals. Second, there is a growing realization in the country’s defence establishment that it can utilize diplomacy to improve its own defence capabilities and strengthen its domestic defence industries. This is particularly important for Indonesia in view of the negative impact US sanctions in the 1990s had on the operational effectiveness of the TNI.

Figure 5
Indonesia’s Bilateral Defence Diplomacy
(2003–08)

Source: Statistical figures based on the number of defence diplomatic events or activities compiled from I’dil Syawfi, Aktifitas Diplomasi Pertahanan Indonesia Dalam Pemenuhan Tujuan-Tujuan Pertahanan Indonesia (2003–2008), Master’s Thesis, University of Indonesia, 2009.
In total, Indonesia engaged 32 countries in its defence diplomacy, of which the top ten were the country’s most crucial security partners (and weapons suppliers) as well as potential rivals. The composition of the countries that Indonesia has engaged also suggests the growing need to diversify its strategic partners “based on shared intraregional security concerns”. The United States, Australia and China have been the top three countries towards which Indonesia’s defence diplomacy activities have been directed (see Figure 6). Aside from the various bilateral defence diplomacy activities with these countries, Indonesia has also signed strategic partnership agreements with all three, as well as with India. It is also worth noting that in recent years China, France, South Korea and the Netherlands have become important sources of weapons platforms and defence technological assistance for Indonesia.

**Figure 6**  
*Indonesia’s Bilateral Defence Diplomacy (2003–08)*

Singapore and Malaysia represent the country’s closest neighbours but are also viewed as potential rivals. Indonesia’s relationship with Malaysia has deteriorated due to maritime boundary disputes and other issues, while contentious issues with Singapore include the absence of an extradition treaty, though this results more from the unwillingness of the Indonesian parliament to ratify the treaty that was signed as a package deal with Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) mentioned above. Indonesian MPs recently argued that the DCA could potentially infringe on Indonesia’s territory and endanger its security as it might allow Singaporeans to train with a third party force on Indonesian soil — and because allegedly almost half of the training area “turned out to be protected forests”. Another recent contentious issue is the city state’s import of sand used for land reclamation projects, which could be construed by some to potentially alter its maritime boundaries with Indonesia. Given these underlying enmities, defence diplomacy as CBMs can arguably be seen as a foreign policy mechanism to help safeguard Indonesia’s territorial integrity while simultaneously ensuring regional security. Indonesia has also conducted bilateral defence diplomacy with nearly all its ASEAN partners (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Indonesia’s Defence Diplomacy with Southeast Asian Countries
(2003–08)

Source: Statistical figures based on the number of defence diplomatic events or activities compiled from I’dil Syawfi, Aktifitas Diplomasi Pertahanan Indonesia Dalam Pemenuhan Tujuan-Tujuan Pertahanan Indonesia (2003–2008), Master’s Thesis, University of Indonesia, 2009.
The above data and analysis suggest that Indonesia’s contribution to regional security through bilateral defence diplomacy is (1) mainly focused on increasing regional stability through CBMs, and (2) is targeted at its most important regional neighbours (Singapore, Malaysia and Australia) and the Great Powers (United States, China, India and Russia) so as to safeguard the country’s territorial and national integrity, while improving the capacity of domestic defence industries. This suggests that not only do shared norms still matter in shaping Indonesia’s foreign policy and profile, but that the country’s rising bilateral defence diplomacy represents one side of its strategy to compensate for its strategic weakness — the other side being multilateral engagement.

**Multilateral Defence Diplomacy**

Indonesia’s multilateral defence diplomacy efforts are primarily centred on ASEAN-related events and institutions, especially the ARF. This is despite the scepticism of some scholars who have argued that while ASEAN may have the potential to be a “security community”, the organization’s norms of non-interference and focus on economic over security issues, makes it difficult for the regional grouping to seriously tackle the region’s core traditional and non-traditional security challenges.\(^{52}\) Between ASEAN and the ARF, the latter occupies quantitatively more of Indonesia’s multilateral defence diplomatic activities (see Figure 8). Indonesian officials participated...
in 177 ARF-related events from 1994 until 2009, including the ARF ministerial meeting, ARF Senior Officials’ Meeting (ARF-SOM), ARF Inter-Sessional Group on Confidence Building Measures (ARF-ISG-CBM), ARF Security Policy Conference (ASPC) and the ARF Defence Officials’ Dialogue (ARF-DOD).

For Indonesia, the larger quantitative portion of ARF rather ASEAN-related defence diplomacy events is related to the realization since the mid-1990s that engaging the major powers in security discussions was critical. In terms of the ARF’s attributes, two significant results are salient for Indonesia. First, the ARF is predicated on the norms of behaviour stemming from the “ASEAN Way”. Consequently, the ARF has become an important vehicle for Indonesia and ASEAN to spread regional norms and identity sharing. Second, the ARF is the only regional institution in the world that includes the United States, Europe, China and other regional powers. This has allowed Indonesia and ASEAN to engage and encourage a balance among the Great Powers, while providing ASEAN and its neighbours a forum to deepen mutual comfort levels. Put another way, the ARF can be seen as a forum for Indonesia to expand strategic engagement with the major powers.

Despite the higher frequency of ARF-related events and meetings, on the more practical security issues closer to Indonesia’s own interests, such as the use of military assets for disaster relief or maritime security, Indonesia has been relying more on ASEAN-related events, including the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) and ASEAN Chiefs of Defence Forces Informal Meeting (ACDFIM). Indonesian defence officials have also been involved in the annual ASEAN Special Senior Officials’ Meeting (ASEAN Special SOM), ASEAN Chiefs of Army Multilateral Meeting, ASEAN Navy Interaction, ASEAN Air Force Chiefs Conference, ASEAN Military Intelligence Meeting and ASEAN Armies Rifles Meet. On average, between 2000 and 2009, ASEAN, formally and informally, organized fifteen meetings a year on defence or security related matters (see Figure 9), in which Indonesia played an active role.

In this regard, ASEAN-related events, though largely informal, have been considered as a step forward in improving regional CBMs. Indeed, according to Indonesia’s former Minister of Defence, ASEAN’s multilateralism and regional community building have allowed the creation of a “strategic space” needed to boost domestic economic and political development while accommodating the interests of extra-regional powers. Specifically, the belief among the defence and foreign policy establishments is that such multilateral defence
diplomatic activities is meant to ensure regional stability and security against a backdrop of (1) increasing geopolitical competition among the Great Powers, (2) the rise of non-traditional security challenges, and (3) ongoing territorial and boundary disputes. The informality of the events meanwhile reflects the realization on the part of policy-makers that given the region's history and changing strategic environment, there is a need to engage regional countries on difficult security issues in a gradual, manageable way.

**Conclusion**

The preceding analysis suggests the following three conclusions. First, Indonesia's historical and political experiences laid the foundation for the country's "independent and active" foreign policy. The manifestation of this doctrine is seen in the country's "moral force" or "soft power" in shaping the regional and global environment through participation in international institutions, such
as the UN and ASEAN, and successive governments’ adherence to the principles of non-intervention and multilateralism. The country’s foreign policy elite also claim collectively that they generated new ideas and thinking on issues related to important regional and global issues. Indonesia’s democratization has enhanced its “soft power”. However, and secondly, democratization has made it more difficult for Indonesia to pursue a stable and coherent foreign policy. This is primarily due to the growing complexity of foreign policymaking, especially given the increasing role of the parliament and public opinion. Third, Indonesia’s strategic weakness dominates the thinking of the defence and military establishment, which in turn has influenced foreign policy-makers.

These three arguments underlie the thinking and rationale of Indonesia’s growing global security role through the UN as well as the country’s growing engagement in multilateral defence diplomacy, both through ASEAN and the ARF. While it cannot be entirely denied that Indonesia’s size plays into the perceptions of its neighbours and observers, a more nuanced assessment that considers the country’s values, domestic politics, and strategic environment enable us to better understand its rising profile. At the broader level, the analysis presented suggests that material capabilities alone — economic, size, geography, and military — cannot fully account for the rise of global powers. In other words, for us to understand why some rising powers rise the way they do, we need to delve into other non-material factors.

NOTES

Parts of this paper were presented at the 28th Annual International Conference on Security Affairs, organized by the Research Institute for National Security Affairs (RINSA), Korea National Defence University, Seoul, 30 August 2010. The author would like to acknowledge the support of the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and the thoughtful comments and assistance from I’dil Syawfi, Hanani Prieta, Hazelia Margareth, Lee Seok-Soo, Jurgen Ruland, Sheldon Simon and two anonymous reviewers of Contemporary Southeast Asia.


3 See for example, Ann Marie Murphy, “Indonesia Returns to the International Stage: Good News for the United States”, Orbis 53, no. 1 (2009): 65–79;
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8 For a recent debate on power in International Relations, see Stefano Guzzini, On the Measure of Power and the Power of Measure in International Relations (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2009), pp. 5–15.


13 See Evan A. Laksmana, “Indonesia’s pivotal role in the US grand strategy”, Jakarta Post, 6 October 2009.


Hatta was not only among the country’s founding fathers and its first vice-president, but also the chief architect of Indonesia’s foreign policy in the 1940s and 1950s.


For an initial history of Indonesia’s foreign policy, see ibid., 306–14.


Ibid.

For details, see Rene L. Pattiradjawane, “Indonesia Dalam Politik Globalisasi”, *Kompas*, 5 May 2010.


On the personalistic nature of Indonesia’s foreign policy, especially under the country’s first two presidents, see Michael Leifer, *Indonesia’s Foreign Policy* (London: The Royal Institute for International Affairs, 1983).


For more details on how parliamentary politics shapes Indonesia’s foreign policy, see Jürgen Rüland, “Deepening ASEAN Cooperation through Democratization? The Indonesian Legislature and Foreign Policymaking”, *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 9, no. 3 (2009): 373–402.

For a discussion on foreign policy and public opinion under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, see for example Hadi Soesastro and Evan A. Laksmana.


35 For details on the ASEAN Security Community proposal and the events and reasoning behind it, see Christopher Roberts, *ASEAN’s Myanmar Crisis: Challenges to the Pursuit of a Security Community* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010), pp. 180–84.

36 The idea that the United States helped Indonesia rise to regional and global prominence is explored in Laksmana, “Indonesia’s pivotal role in the US grand strategy”, op. cit.


48 Ibid.

50 The Indonesian navy’s largest warship development is its SIGMA-class corvette with the Netherlands, while the air force signed an agreement with South Korea in 2010 to participate in its KFX advanced fighter programme.


54 In discussions with the author from June to September 2010, several junior diplomats and mid-level defence officials who had participated in ASEAN’s defence diplomatic events made this argument, but never substantiate their claim. And since the meeting notes are not publicly available it is also difficult to confirm their accounts.
