

Jakarta's soft power is on the rise

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I visited Jakarta three weeks ago for the launch of the Indonesian National Defence University (NDU). The NDU will train the new generation of Indonesian military officers. In a break with the practice of the Indonesian armed forces (TNI) during the Suharto era, the officers will be exposed to concepts and ideas circulating internationally in strategic studies and defence management.

One consequence of Western sanctions against the training of Indonesian military officers during the 1990s was that they became inward-looking. The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies was among the first to accept Indonesian officers for postgraduate degree courses beginning in 2000. In talking to them, I was struck by how little the training of military officers had changed since the time when I lived in Indonesia in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Yet these officers were expected to perform their functions in a period of rapid change in Indonesia. The TNI had been schooled in the doctrines of *dwifungsi*, where the military had both civil and military functions. It had to adjust to a very different domestic environment after the fall of President Suharto. It is now no longer the dominant institution in Indonesian society and has to work with other actors.

The changing role of the TNI and the new training opportunities at home and abroad will lead to a different outlook among its officers. The TNI will focus on its military responsibilities. There is growing self-confidence and a belief that Indonesia deserves recognition as a rising power in Asia. Nevertheless, Indonesia's force projection capabilities remain limited, especially as spending on navy and air force modernisation has been constrained by restricted budget allocations.

But we will see Indonesia exercising soft power. With the West continuing to face a threat from Muslim radicals, it will view the emergence of a democratic regime in Indonesia positively, seeing it as a model worthy of emulation in the Muslim world. Significantly, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Indonesia on her first trip abroad in her new role. President Barack Obama will probably visit Indonesia when he attends the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Singapore in November.

Surveys in the run-up to legislative elections on April 9 indicate the three parties likely to win the largest number of seats in Parliament will be secular ones: the Democratic Party led by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Golkar led by Vice-President Jusuf Kalla and the Indonesian Democratic Party - Struggle (PDI-P) led by former president Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Dr Yudhoyono is the front runner for another term as president. Significantly, everyone expects the next president to emerge from the electoral process, not via a coup. The establishment of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious stable leadership within a democratic framework is a considerable achievement. We should expect more international attention to be paid to the views and perspectives of Indonesia's leaders over the next five years.

For Indonesia's friends, used to dealing with technocratic decision-makers in the Suharto era, the past decade has been a learning process. Fears of Indonesia breaking up along the lines of Yugoslavia have receded. Even former Aceh rebels are now contesting elections. The

risk of centrifugal pressures has been overcome by the promulgation of laws providing provincial governments with greater autonomy. No longer do foreign investors head only to Jakarta if they are interested in investing in Indonesia. The local authorities have a voice, especially if such investments involve the extraction of natural resources.

The global economic meltdown will pose major challenges for Indonesia. Every year, a number equal to Singapore's entire population joins Indonesia's labour force. Slower growth could increase pressures for populist policies. Although the Indonesian government has predicted 4 per cent growth for this year, the global downturn suggests that this is unlikely to be attained.

Political mobilisation through the media, Internet, Facebook and SMSes means that the Indonesian government has to be able to carry public opinion on various issues, ranging from the signing of international agreements to even the appointment of ambassadors. No longer can foreign governments or multinational corporations deal only with key technocrats.

But the diversity of views does not mean inevitably a weak entity. Indonesia is being invited to attend G-20 summit meetings. We should expect Indonesia to take a more active role in regional and global affairs. Instead of the low key approach of the past decade, Indonesia is likely over the next five years to seek the leadership of the region, just as how Mr Suharto saw himself as the natural leader of Asean. If Indonesia's neighbours are to effectively manage their relationships with Indonesia, they need to understand these trends and appreciate the underlying resilience of Indonesian society.

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