



**S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL
OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**
A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

RSIS COMMENTARIES

RSIS Commentaries are intended to provide timely and, where appropriate, policy relevant background and analysis of contemporary developments. The views of the authors are their own and do not represent the official position of the S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU. These commentaries may be reproduced electronically or in print with prior permission from RSIS. Due recognition must be given to the author or authors and RSIS. Please email: RSISPublication@ntu.edu.sg or call (+65) 6790 6982 to speak to the Editor RSIS Commentaries, Yang Razali Kassim.

No. 168/2011 dated 16 November 2011

Indonesia and EAS: Search for a 'dynamic equilibrium'

By Leonard C. Sebastian

Synopsis

As the region undergoes a transition to a new balance of power, Indonesia sees the inclusion of the two major powers, Russia and the United States, in the EAS as achieving a "dynamic equilibrium". How will this shape the region's strategic configuration?

Commentary

WHEN THE leaders of 18 Asia Pacific nations gather in Bali this week for the 6th East Asia Summit (EAS) the stage will be set for Indonesia to reclaim its place as one of Asia's pivotal states in a region that accounts for over half the world's economic activity and is the focal point of security concerns of the 21st century.

Signalling this intent in his address to the World Economic Forum in Davos last February, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono pointed out: "Asia is of course more than China, Japan and India." By implication, Indonesia wants to shape regional trends as new economic and security challenges necessitate the need for innovative frameworks and architecture.

Democratic transition

The trauma of the post-Suharto transition is now a distant memory. Then, international pressure and the need for political legitimacy required Indonesia to compromise and finally give up its annexation of Timor-Leste; manage the conflict and stabilise the internal security situation in Aceh; and take decisive steps to counter terrorism in the aftermath of the Bali and Jakarta bombings. Unsurprisingly, domestic security priorities constrained foreign policy options and forced Indonesia to be inward-looking.

Having managed successive transitions of power in a democratic, peaceful and constitutional manner, Indonesia prides itself as the third largest democracy in the world. Its foreign policy now reflects these new domestic realities. Jakarta seeks to project its democratic image by utilising a regional approach to frame and shape agendas within the framework of ASEAN.

During the EAS Indonesia will place emphasis on "Community-building" as an extension of Indonesia's prime strategy in its role as the ASEAN 2011 Chair. ASEAN's theme in 2011 is the "ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations". Focusing on this theme, and straddling both the Indian and Pacific Oceans, Indonesia wants to shape a future Asia-Pacific Community that will be framed and influenced by agendas and outcomes developed by ASEAN.

The Bali Principles

For this purpose, Indonesia will propose the adoption of a set of principles for mutually beneficial relations among East Asian countries. Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa explained that the Bali Principles will be modeled on the spirit of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). They will be based on Indonesia's foreign policy doctrine of "dynamic equilibrium" to manage interactions between states in the Asia Pacific region, particularly to accommodate China and the US. The principles will promote common security, common stability and common prosperity. The draft concept, according to Dr Natalegawa, has received support from other participating countries and should further strengthen commitment to the TAC, which all EAS members have signed.

The EAS will also cover the issues of traditional and non-traditional security, in particular in the areas of maritime security, transnational crimes, terrorism, piracy, as well as non-proliferation and disarmament. The five priority areas of the EAS outlined in the Joint Communiqué of the 44th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting are: finance; energy; education, global health and pandemic diseases. Disaster management will also be a key part of the discussions.

Relating to the economic agenda, the participating countries have committed to support the implementation of the Master Plan of ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC). Seeing its potential benefits to the region as a whole, they would aim to include physical connectivity in projects under MPAC, such as a railway to link Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia, and people-to-people connectivity through educational exchanges.

Discussion during their retreat will include geopolitical security issues covering the situation in the Middle East and North Africa; maritime security issues; and nuclear armed proliferation.

'Rowing between two reefs'

Indonesia sees the formal inclusion of the two major powers, Russia and the United States, in EAS as achieving a "dynamic equilibrium" that now involve all the powers that shape the region's strategic configuration. "Dynamic equilibrium" is also seen as an effort to counterbalance the increasing influence of China in the region.

This approach is consistent with the view expounded by Vice-President Mohammad Hatta, on 2 September 1948 which became known as "mendayung antara dua karang" (rowing between two reefs) where Indonesia's best policy was to adopt a strategy that does not make it the object of an international conflict.

President Yudhoyono enjoys close relationships in the Asia Pacific with US President Barack Obama, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and Australia's Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd. His ideas on regional order have been shaped by these men.

However, Indonesia believes that the centrality of ASEAN is crucial in order to maintain a balance of power between the US, China, India and Russia within the EAS. Their involvement would foster economic activities and investment in this region. Nevertheless Indonesia does not want the role of ASEAN to erode when the transformation of the EAS into an Asia-Pacific Community finally begins to take shape.

Leonard C. Sebastian is an Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Indonesia Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University.