

Indonesia as a [Possible] Leader in the New Regional Architecture: Future or Illusion?

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Introduction

The issue on Indonesia's leadership is certainly not a new one. In the Old Order era under President Soekarno, the leadership role was manifested in the aggressive foreign policy to struggle against colonialism powers. Despite of its poor economic conditions, Indonesia's foreign policy was marked with many 'aggressive' initiatives, starting from 'Konfrontasi' (confrontation) policy against its immediate neighbor Malaysia, its decision to pull out from the United Nations membership, and also the idea to create the New Emerging Forces coalition and also the "Jakarta-PhnomPenh-Hanoi-Beijing-Pyongyang axis" to fight against Western imperialism and neocolonialism.¹ Subsequently, the New Order era under the leadership of President Soeharto seemed to take a more lenient stance with the focus to rebuild the collapsed economic condition due to excessive foreign policy activities conducted by Soekarno.

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¹ Donald E. Weatherbee, *International Relations in Southeast Asia: The Struggle for Autonomy*, 2nd Ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 70-72.

Soeharto was the important actor behind the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which emphasized on the importance of developing each nation's resilience which then collectively would transform into regional resilience, with the foundation of non-interference and full respect toward each other's sovereignty.² The establishment of regional stability, free from the external intervention, especially during the competition of the two superpowers during the Cold War era, was considered a necessary condition for the countries in Southeast Asia to build themselves. Since then, the strong figure of Soeharto was crucial in leading the development of ASEAN, where ASEAN reached its golden times marked with high regional economic growth and then also its expansion to incorporate the other Southeast Asian countries.

After the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the debate over the leadership void in ASEAN emerged. The serious negative impacts suffered by the Indonesian economy led to political instability, causing the downfall of the authoritarian regime of Soeharto after its 32-year rule. At least for half a decade, Indonesia had relatively distanced itself from international exposure and struggled with its internal democratic reform as well as challenges from armed separatist groups that had been previously oppressed by the Soeharto regime. This condition influenced Indonesia's leadership in ASEAN as it lacked the regional it used to have.³ Nevertheless, many believed that Indonesia would not forget that it should regain its leadership status in region, although it will not happen in the near future.⁴

In the past five years, discussions on the possibility for Indonesia to regain leadership have taken place both at the regional and international arena. As many leaders praised Indonesia for its relatively fast economic rebound and ability to maintain its annual economic growth around 6%, its membership in the prestigious economic grouping G20, its ability to settle internal conflicts (peace settlement with Free Aceh

² C.P.F. Luhulima, "Indonesia and ASEAN beyond 2014", *The Jakarta Post*, 7 February 2013.

³ Anthony Smith, "Indonesia's Role in ASEAN: The End of Leadership?" *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 21(2), 1999.

⁴ *Ibid.* See also Paul Dibb, "Indonesia: The Key to South-East Asia's Security", *International Affairs*, 77(4), 2001. Dibb predicted that Indonesia would not recover its former leading status in the region until at least 2010.

Movement is an imminent example), as well as various initiatives to shaping the new regional architecture have been portrayed by many analysts and policymakers as indicators of Indonesia's rising status as a middle power country.⁵ This ascendancy to a middle power status is being perceived as a strong support for Indonesia's ambition to reclaim its leadership role, not only in Southeast Asia, but also in the wider region such as the East Asia. Indonesia's latest initiative to take the chairmanship in ASEAN earlier in 2011 than it should be in 2013, by swapping with Brunei, also signaled Indonesia's intention to regain its leadership in ASEAN, which has been in vacuum since its latest chairmanship in 2003.

While the path towards becoming a middle power is naturally developed as a country's economic, military and political power increase, the notion of "leadership" needs additional factors. To lead, in a simple definition, would involve the capacity to give direction and to influence others to follow.

Hence, the ultimate question is whether it is possible for Indonesia to become a leader in the region; or, at least, whether it has the potentials to lead. Pessimists would argue that due to Indonesia's internal problems such as corruption, internal conflicts, and power politics among the political parties that leads to political instability, it would be difficult for Indonesia to raise its status as a middle power country, let one become a leader in the region. On the other hand, optimists would argue that there is always a chance for Indonesia to become a middle power and also to become a future leader, due to its size of territory and population as well as richness of natural resources compared to the other countries in the region.

In this paper, I argue that it is hard to see that such future would take place in the near future, although it has the aspiration as well as the potentials to become a leader in the future,. This argument is based on several reasons. First, there is a lack of leadership element in the concepts or terms used by the elites to elaborate Indonesia's foreign policy. Second, while it is undoubted that Indonesia has been showing some gestures of leadership in its various initiatives, both at ASEAN level as well as global level, however the positive results to affirm In-

⁵ Santo Darmosumarto, "Indonesia: A New Middle Power", *The Jakarta Post*, 30 October 2009.

donesia's leadership are yet to be seen. At ASEAN level, Indonesia can hardly reclaim leadership since ASEAN is not showing steps toward unity, in spite of the commitment to achieve ASEAN Community by 2015. At the larger region as well as global level, as a result of inability of ASEAN to unite, Indonesia is facing serious challenge to implement its idea of ASEAN centrality in the new regional architecture in East Asia. In other issue such as norm promoter of democracy and human rights principle, Indonesia through its Bali Democracy Forum initiative can hardly reap the fruit since it has still struggled to transform this into an action-oriented forum. As on human rights, even at ASEAN level, Indonesia still cannot influence the newly joined ASEAN members to agree to the universal standard, but rather to agree only at the lowest-common-denomination level. Third, while some major powers are welcoming Indonesia's initiative to take a greater responsibility both in the region as well as in the global level, Indonesia's aspiration toward leadership is still also facing some challenges from the smaller neighboring countries which still maintain concern that Indonesia's leadership also means that Indonesia will become a dominating power, let alone a threatening power.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The first section examines how to Indonesian government expressed the idea of leadership. It is conducted through the observation on various speeches made by President Yudhoyono and Minister Natalegawa to see what sort of 'intellectual' ideas to offer as part of Indonesia's initiative to provide intellectual leadership. The second section lists out cases where Indonesia showed gestures of leadership in the Southeast Asia region, as well as cases where Indonesia cannot claim that it has leadership, from 2003 until 2012. The third section focuses particularly on the level acceptance from different countries, both within the country as well as immediate and far neighboring countries should Indonesia wish to pursue its track to become leader in the region.

Intellectual Leadership

Before elaborating the gestures of Indonesia's leadership, it is necessary to have a sort of definition on the concept of leadership. Here I withdraw the understanding on this concept in relation with the elaboration on the concept of middle power. In his paper, Daniel Flemes

explained on what constitutes the middle power. Basically, what can be categorized as middle power are states that are not superpowers or great powers but have a level of influence internationally. Middle power does not particularly seek to impose a vision of an ideal world but rather interested in creating a stable and orderly environment. It is also been characterized as a state that is active in international organizations and supports the aims of creating peace and international security. It has also a sense of 'global responsibility' and usually having great interest to act as a mediator as one way to exercise leadership.⁶

Now the question is: where is the idea of leadership being placed in the current Indonesia's foreign policy? How do elites translate this idea into a more practical terms or concepts about the roles that Indonesia wish to play? It is important to note first that in spite of Indonesia's aspiration to gain leadership, the government clearly recognized that the time is not ripe yet to establish leadership in the sense of playing a role as hegemonic power, due to our insufficient military and economic capabilities as well as domestic problems faced by the country. Instead, the government came up with a formulation of "intellectual leadership", using a soft power, rather than hard power to give meaning to its leadership. Then this intellectual leadership, based on my observation, has been translated at least in three concepts or terms that are incorporated into Indonesia's foreign policy.

First, the intellectual leadership is expected to be taken form in the role to create the 'dynamic equilibrium' in the new regional architecture, which focuses on the maintenance of ASEAN centrality. As explained by Minister Natalegawa:

"Moreover, throughout 2010, Indonesia made concrete and proactive contributions to the discussions on the Regional Architecture Building, in order to maintain the principle of ASEAN as the driving force. The expansion of East Asia Summit membership, through the simultaneous admittance of the United States and Russia is one of the manifestations of these concrete efforts. For Indonesia, all these are to ensure a peaceful and stable situation in the region; common security and common prosperity, a situation that is marked by 'dynamic equilibrium'... Hence,

⁶ Daniel Flemes, "Conceptualising Regional Power in International Relations: Lessons from the South African Case", *GIGA Working Papers* No. 53, June 2007, p. 1-59.

*throughout 2010, Indonesia demonstrated its 'intellectual leadership' in the discussions on Regional Architecture Building. Indonesia played an active role in ensuring the centrality of ASEAN in responding to various initiatives regarding the development of the regional architecture, including the expansion of the East Asia Summit."*⁷

In one interview, Natalegawa envisioned of Indonesia's leadership role as a conductor of an orchestra – which is ASEAN. According to him, Indonesia has become the 'glue' among the ASEAN member states and has been able to show its leadership by not forcing its own will to others despite of its nature as the biggest country in the region. By playing its role as a conductor in ASEAN, in his view, Indonesia can enhance its role as the regulator to determine the creation of dynamic equilibrium in the larger region, i.e. the East Asia. He described this as follow:

*"As a determinant actor of the dynamic equilibrium, Indonesia can move from one stepping stone to another without raising any concern. Meanwhile, there is no one dominant country in the region, rather it is marked by the inclusiveness of the states. They interact each other to gain common benefit and common interest while respecting each other... With our diplomacy capacity, Indonesia can move tactically from one point to another. Creating equilibrium in the region... as if Indonesia is a conductor so that the music can be beautiful and enjoyable to be listened..."*⁸

An Indonesian journalist attempted to explain this 'dynamic equilibrium' – which he called as Natalegawa's doctrine as a situation where there is no single dominating power in the region where all countries interact in a peaceful and benefiting manner. It is also, according to him, as a way to disengage the countries in the region from external dependencies to foreign military powers as a guarantee to their security. Instead, this doctrine is a strategic framework which accommodates different major powers such as China, Japan, and India

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Annual Press Statement of the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Indonesia Dr. R.M. Marty M. Natalegawa," Jakarta, 7 January 2011, accessed in July 2013 <http://www.kemlu.go.id/Pages/SpeechTranscriptionDisplay.aspx?Name1=Pidato&Name2=Menteri&IDP=698&l=en>

⁸ "Diplomasi Indonesia: Menjadi Dirigen "Orkestra" Kawasan", *Kompas*, 25 October 2010.

as well as non-East Asian countries like the United States and Russia. It is a condition of interdependence which will benefit all.⁹

The second concept offered by President Yudhoyono, which is considered to guiding Indonesia's foreign policy, is "a million friends, zero enemy." This concept was introduced as the president entered his second term in 2009. He stated that,

"Now Indonesia is facing new strategic environment, in which there is no single country that considers Indonesia as an enemy, and there is also no country that Indonesia claims as its opponent. Therefore, Indonesia now can freely implement 'all directions foreign policy' in which we can have 'a million friends and zero enemy'. Indonesia will cooperate with any country which has similar will and goal, in particular to build a world order that is peaceful, just, democratic and welfare."¹⁰

Then, in the Foreign Minister Annual Statement in 2010, Minister Natalegawa reinstated this idea clearly as the country's vision:

"Indeed, where foreign policy is concerned, the year ahead promises much in solidifying Indonesia's place in the world: the reaping of its democratic dividend. A nation able to strengthen its contribution within its immediate region of Southeast Asia and yet at the same time enhancing its global interests and concerns. A nation able to concretize its vision of a thousand friends and zero enemy..."¹¹

The third concept which can be also considered as a way to indicate Indonesia's leadership is the role as a bridge-builder. Still in the same speech in 2010, Minister Natalegawa mentioned that,

"Indonesia's diplomacy will continue to actively strive to promote consensus and, at the same time, through concrete national actions, demonstrate what can be achieved if each nation shoulder its own responsibilities. Indeed, the year ahead is expected to bear witness to an enhanced role by Indonesia in building bridges among divides."¹²

⁹ Rene L Pattiradjawane, "Doktrin Natalegawa: Indonesia dalam Politik Globalisasi, *Kompas*, 5 May 2010.

¹⁰ Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, "Pidato Awal Jabatan Presiden RI 2009-2014," Jakarta, 20 October 2009, accessed in June 2013 <http://www.presidenri.go.id/index.php/pidato/2009/10/20/1237.html>

¹¹ Marty Natalegawa, "Indonesia and the World 2010," *The Jakarta Post*, 26 January 2010

¹² *Ibid.*

This term has been restated again in his annual speech in 2011, *“Indonesian foreign policy has not been found wanting. It has been principled, visionary and yet pragmatic in actively seeking to find solutions, in building bridges of understanding, in fostering consensus.”*¹³

From these elaborations, unfortunately we can hardly see a clear direction on how the government envision the steps toward creating leadership. While the concept of dynamic equilibrium is indeed beautiful at the theoretical level, however it is somehow disengaged with the idea of leadership. It is not clear of how a vision or a dream about a situation or condition can be perceived as a doctrine to guide Indonesia’s foreign policy, especially to practice her leadership. Moreover, there is no clear parameter to say that equilibrium is being achieved at some point, especially when it is said that the equilibrium itself is ‘dynamic’.

As for the ‘a million friends, zero enemy’ notion, it is difficult to find the element of leadership in it. As the impression of this concept is to be a friend to all, leadership is not about being friendly to everybody, but it is about taking decision, including a difficult one, even at the risk of not favoring others. While holding on to this idea of making friends with as many countries as possible, Indonesia has not until now opened a formal relations with Israel. This ‘omni-directional hope’ clearly indicates Indonesia’s wish to project its own favorable image¹⁴, which I doubt will somehow useful to establishing the country’s leadership. At the end, rather than indicating leadership, this gesture indeed is only a common principle in interactions with other.

Finally, unlike the two previous concepts, this bridge-builder or mediating role has more potential as one of the bricks to build Indonesia’s leadership. Besides offering its good will to help mediate intra-regional conflicts such as in Southern Philippines and Southern Thailand, or even at the larger region, such as to participate in the Six-Party Talks – making it to become Seven-Party Talks – to deal with the Korean Peninsula tension, there is also an ambition to play a bridging role be-

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Annual Press Statement of the Foreign Minister,” 2011.

¹⁴ Donald K. Emmerson, “Is Indonesia Rising? It Depends”, in Anthony Reid (Ed), *Indonesia Rising: The Repositioning of Asia’s Third Giant* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012), 71

tween the Western democratic principle with Islamic values. Indonesia has been portrayed and also portray herself as a perfect example on how democracy can run hand-in-hand in a the largest moslem country in the world. However, this role is not easily to be played since Indonesia has never been an Islamic state from the beginning, making it in a difficult position to represent the Islamic world, and also that the Indonesian case is considered unique as other moslem countries may not simply take its experience to be applied in their own domestic arena.¹⁵

Indonesia's Gestures of Leadership

After looking at the ideational level about what does it mean with Indonesia's leadership, now we continue to see how those ideas have been translated into real actions and to what extent such gestures have brought significant results to creating Indonesia's leadership. In the intra-ASEAN area, I choose to elaborate on Indonesia's initiative as a promotor of human rights principle; a mediating role in the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia over Preah Vihear temple, and in the issue of Myanmar. Then, in 'outer' ASEAN area, I examine the Indonesia's initiative in the expansion of East Asia Summit and the idea of ASEAN centrality, and Bali Democracy Forum.

Human Rights

Since taking up the position of chairmanship in 2003, Indonesia has gradually showed its intention to regain leadership in ASEAN after series of internal economic and socio-political crises from 1998 until 2002. This leadership can be seen when Indonesia came out, in 2003, with a proposal of ASEAN Security Community (ASC) – then reconstructed into ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) which basically reminded ASEAN of the principles in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, such as non-use of force, peaceful conflict resolution, as well as promotion of democratic values, good governance, rule of law and promotion and protection of human rights. Since then Indonesia has positioned itself as a 'norm promoter' by putting so much effort to ensure that those principles to be adopted as ASEAN new principles, later on in the ASEAN Charter, something that we would

¹⁵ Rizal Sukma, "Debating Indonesia's Global Role", *The Jakarta Post*, 10 March 2010.

not imagine to be embraced by 'old' ASEAN. To pursue further, Indonesia then engaged in tough negotiation process with ASEAN member states to set up the first ASEAN human rights body – then named the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) – particularly on the Terms of Reference to elaborate the mandate and functions of this Commission. Recently, Indonesia continued its effort to materialize the ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights as part of the commitment to ensure ASEAN's commitment in human rights field. In addition to this, Indonesia also pushed for the establishment of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR), which is aimed to conduct research and provide policy recommendations for ASEAN states in conflict resolution.

While Indonesia can claim a level of success in terms of pushing for some novel ideas —which used to be a taboo in ASEAN to be touched on -- to be recognized and accommodated by ASEAN; the loopholes on those instruments are still obvious. The AICHR still does not have the capacity to conduct special fact-finding mission to any ASEAN member state to scrutinize any human rights violation case. The Commission also has no authority to give sanction should any of ASEAN member states conduct serious human rights violations. Even almost three years after its establishment, it is still not clear on how certain individual/groups can directly bring up cases related to human rights violations to be addressed by AICHR. AICHR has not also set up a mechanism on how to have dialogue with civil society organizations that deal with human rights issue in their daily activities. To sum up, Indonesia is yet been able to show its leadership to guide ASEAN member states to agree on an equal standard of how adherence toward non-interference principle can be modified or relaxed if there is a challenge of serious human rights violation. Taking up the recent examples, Indonesia has not bold enough to at least condemn the cases of human rights activists' disappearance and ask the AICHR to take action toward this issue.¹⁶ Here, leadership certainly involved boldness to speak up, especially on something that we struggle for and

¹⁶ Mong Palatino, "Somchai, Jonas, Sombath: Southeast Asia's Missing Human Rights Warriors", *The Diplomat*, 16 April 2013, accessed in June 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/asean-beat/2013/04/16/somchai-jonas-sombath-southeast-asias-missing-human-rights-warriors/>

even more, what we have agreed upon, in this case promotion and protection on human rights.

Mediation role

Indonesia's leadership is also shown through the government's offer to play a role in conflict mediation or facilitation in the region. After the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) decided to leave the issue to ASEAN in early 2011, Indonesia then offered its assistance to facilitate the conflict settlement in the border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia over the land of Preah Vihear Temple, to follow up the decision made by the International Court of Justice (ICJ).¹⁷ Indonesia then also offered both parties to send military observers to the border area to ensure the ceasefire in the demilitarized zone between the two parties.¹⁸ However, almost a year after such offer, the mission could not be sent due to the unsettled Terms of Reference to regulate the deployment of the military observers.¹⁹ The current status until late-April 2013 is both parties are still waiting for the ICJ to give its judgment over the previous ICJ decision made in 15 June 1962 over the ownership of the Preah Vihear Temple. Again, in spite of Indonesia's initiative to facilitate the conflict, Indonesia has not been able to influence both parties to refer to ASEAN's dispute settlement mechanism to seek solution for their problem, which then challenged Indonesia's leadership.

Myanmar

Indonesia's leadership has been demonstrated in the way it dealt with the issue of Myanmar. To respond to the humanitarian crisis in the post-Cyclone Nargis disaster in mid-2008, Indonesia at that time, thanks to the boldness shown by Minister Hassan Wirajuda, challenged the military junta to open up access for assistance from ASEAN and international organizations to help the victims, or otherwise facing the possibility of the implementation of the "Responsibility to Protect"

¹⁷ Louis Charbonneau, "UN Council Leaves Thai-Cambodia Conflict to ASEAN", *Reuters*, 15 February 2011, accessed in June 2013, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/02/14/idINIndia-54894420110214>. See also Mustaqim Adamrah, "ICJ's Ruling on Thai-Cambodia an Affirmation of ASEAN's Role", *The Jakarta Post*, 20 July 2011.

¹⁸ Nani Afrida and Novan Iman Santosa, "RI Ready to Send Observers to Cambodia, Thailand", *The Jakarta Post*, 17 January 2012.

¹⁹ "Pengiriman Pemantau Indonesia Belum Jelas", *Kompas*, 25 January 2012.

principle in which the UN Security Council may take the necessary action to protect the victims.²⁰

Indonesia also intends to show its leading role in guiding Myanmar's path toward democracy. While its previous effort during General Than Shwe era yielded no result, the surprising internal reform opened a way for Indonesia's bigger role in the country. Under President Thein Sein, the Indonesian government, especially through the role of Minister Natalegawa, has shown its strong interest to support Myanmar to implement political, security as well as economic reform as part of its transition toward democracy. The Indonesian government also pushed the international community to soon lifting the sanctions toward the junta in Myanmar in order to help the country to develop. While other ASEAN states were still thinking whether Myanmar should be given a chance to take its chairmanship role in 2014, Indonesia has decided to give its full support, including assisting Myanmar in her preparation process.

In the latest development, the Indonesian government also sought to help the Myanmar government to handling the internal crisis in the Rakhine state, which specifically involved the minority Rohingya people. This is somehow to respond to some domestic pressure in the country, as shown by some demonstrations conducted by various Moslem associations, that Indonesia as a largest Moslem community in the world to take a role in this respect. Early this year, Minister Natalegawa visited Myanmar, at the invitation of the Myanmar government, to see what exactly going on in the Rakhine state and based on what he saw recommended for the government of the urgency to rebuild trust between the Rohingyas and the ethnic Rakhines.²¹ Then, recently prior to attending the ASEAN Summit in Brunei, President Yudhyono also visited the country to urge the respected government to soon end the violence against the Rohingyas.²² However, the President received criticism as he did not take the chance to meet with the people and

²⁰ Kavi Chongkittavorn, "Jakarta Leads ASEAN into New Challenges", *The Jakarta Post*, 22 November 2011.

²¹ "Rohingya, Rakhines Need to Rebuild Trust, Says Indonesia Foreign Minister," *Channel News Asia*, 8 January 2013, accessed in June 2013, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/south-eastasia/view/1246747/1/.html>

²² "Yudhyono urges Myanmar to end sectarian violence", *The Jakarta Post*, 24 April 2013.

civil society but rather limiting this only to the discussion among the elites.²³

East Asia Summit and ASEAN Centrality

In the larger region, Indonesia is showing her leadership, particularly during its chairmanship in ASEAN in 2011, by shaping the new regional architecture by putting forward the initiative to create an expanded East Asia Summit in order to create an open regionalism, which will include the United States and Russia, which are actually not Asians in nature. While this idea is indeed to be welcomed to bring ASEAN to be more confident in dealing with major powers in the region, the question is rather whether ASEAN is able to maintain its centrality in this new architecture. ASEAN is still very much struggling to unite themselves, as we can see from various tensions among the member states, despite of their agreement to establish ASEAN Community. Rizal Sukma, in his article, argued that there is indeed no centrality without unity of ASEAN.²⁴ So, it is actually important that Indonesia leadership should be directed first to unite ASEAN member states, by among others leading the member states to implement what they already committed to do in many ASEAN agreements and declarations.²⁵

However, has Indonesia been successful to unite ASEAN? The last incident of ASEAN's failure to formulate the joint communiqué in the 45th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Phnom Penh in mid-2012 clearly showed that Indonesia has yet been able – if not failed – to unite ASEAN because Cambodia refused to include the South China Sea conflict in the communiqué, due to the pressure given by China as one of the parties in the conflict. Indonesia has not been able to lead ASEAN and save ASEAN's face by just taking action to issue the communiqué without the consent of the ASEAN chair, let alone there is no such mechanism within ASEAN to allow such action to be taken up.²⁶ To add to this, in the case of South China Sea, until now Indonesia is still facing huge difficulties to convince the claimant states from

²³ Daniel Pye, "Indonesia President Visits Burma, Fails to Meet Muslim Leaders", *Irrawaddy*, 23 April 2013, accessed in June 2013, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/32730>

²⁴ Rizal Sukma, "Without Unity, No Centrality," *The Jakarta Post*, 17 July 2012.

²⁵ Rizal Sukma, "Indonesia's Foreign Policy Outlook, 2011," *The Jakarta Post*, 20 December 2010.

²⁶ Sukma, "Without Unity."

ASEAN, i.e. the Philippines and Vietnam not to take their separate actions (tit-for-tat) directly toward China which will harm the process to create the Code of Conduct (CoC), such as to revive military cooperation with the United States, or creating a closer relations with Japan as the country is now involved in tension with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu island.²⁷

In spite of this failure, Indonesia is still trying to do its best to save ASEAN, again as partly also to show Indonesia's leadership. Soon after the failure of ASEAN to come out with a joint communiqué, Minister Natalegawa immediately traveled in 36 hours – nicknamed shuttle diplomacy – to Manila, Hanoi and Phnom Penh to seek those governments' support to the six principles on South China Sea as the common position of ASEAN.²⁸ While this action can be claimed as relatively successful to indicate Indonesia's leadership, but it remains to be seen whether Indonesia can always remind the ASEAN member states to implement these principles, and more importantly to work together to formulate ASEAN's common position to negotiate in China to establish the Code-of-Conduct.

It is important to note that Indonesia has also attempted to continue its leadership beyond its chairmanship period through formulating the ASEAN's vision post-2015 which is 'ASEAN Community in the Global Community of Nations' – known as Bali Concord III. In his annual speech in 2012, Minister Natalegawa basically underlined that Indonesia has initiated ASEAN vision in post-2015, which is a common platform of ASEAN in various global issues in 2022. Indonesia, according to him, has been determined that its contribution would not end after its one-year chairmanship but rather to continue its legacy afterwards, such as what had been shown in its previous initiative of ASEAN Concord on the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 1976 and ASEAN Concord II on ASEAN Security Community (ASC). Unfortunately, up until now, steps toward realizing this vision are remained to be seen and not likely to be in the near future.²⁹

²⁷ Andreas Ismar, "Indonesia Cautions Against South China Sea 'Tit-for-Tat'," *The Wall Street Journal*, 10 December 2012.

²⁸ Bagus BT Saragih, "Marty Charms Manila, Hanoi. Next stop: Phnom Penh," *The Jakarta Post*, 19 July 2012.

²⁹ The 2013 ASEAN Summit in Brunei started to discuss about the realization of this vision.

Bali Democracy Forum

The other initiative taken up by Indonesia to indicate its leadership, especially as a norm promoter is to create the Bali Democracy Forum. Launched in 2008, the Forum is aimed to promote the development of democracy in the Asia-Pacific region through sharing experiences and learning on best practices among the democratic countries. However, the result of such event, in terms of decisions to guiding especially non-democratic countries to follow the democratic path is remained to be seen, due to criticism that not much information can be gathered particularly by the common people about what is going on inside the Forum.³⁰ Thus, the greatest challenge to this initiative is indeed to transform from merely a 'talking' forum into an 'implementing' forum.³¹

The Challenges in Gaining Leadership

There are indeed significant challenges for Indonesia to gain leadership. While Indonesia has been able to a certain extent dealing with its economic problem after the Asian financial crisis in 1997/1998 and has moved to a more democratic system, however, its domestic politics is still far from being a 'healthy' democracy. Since 1999 until now we can witness how Indonesia is continuously struggling with the side effects of the way democracy is being run in the country. Internal conflicts/tensions, instead of caused by ethnic, economic, or religious tensions, are now also taken place because of rough political competitions among the candidates in the local elections, both in the provincial and regency levels. At the same time, political parties, as the ultimate vehicle to conduct democratic system, are pursuing for their vested interests for power and economic gains rather than nurturing good-quality politicians. Parallel to this, members of parliaments are more representing their political parties' interests rather than representing their own people. More sadly, corruption is taking place at all levels, both national and local institutions. According to Paige Johnson Tan, the lack of capacity to lead, because of these problematic economic and

³⁰ Ignas Kleden, "Bali Democracy Forum: Whose Event is It?" *The Jakarta Post*, 8 November 2012.

³¹ Rizal Sukma, "Message from the Third Bali Democracy Forum," *The Jakarta Post*, 13 December 2010.

political conditions, has put a serious tension to Indonesia's capacity to achieve its leadership.³²

In addition to such grim picture, while the government is trying hard to projecting democracy and human rights as part of her intellectual leadership components, the country is now facing serious problem in the application of religious tolerance/ freedom. It is now quite common to see how a group of people can easily resort to violence to ban the construction of certain house of prayers belonged to minority religions, or suspected as false sect, or even killing the followers of that particular sect in order to 'protect' their true teaching. There are several factors of course to blame, yet the ultimate reason is the inability and simply ignorance of the government as well as the respected state apparatus to respond to the situations. As these incident can certainly tarnish Indonesia's image in the world, not much support can be gathered from the people inside the country due to these inconsistencies to practice democracy and respect toward human rights at home. As elucidated well by Rizal Sukma, unless the government is able to manage well with its domestic problems, the country's effort to raise its international profile will soon lose its appetite, both at home and abroad.³³

The other issue to address is the level of leadership Indonesia intends to achieve. One of leading analyst, Dewi Fortuna Anwar back in 1997 highlighted the fact that there are some in-house nationalist who argued that Indonesia can reach its international status without actually focusing – let alone depending too much – its foreign policy on ASEAN. This can be interpreted also that Indonesia does not need to put much efforts to pursue leadership in ASEAN since the association, with all her problems caused by strict adherence to non-interference principle, is actually serving as a 'golden cage' for Indonesia's rise.³⁴ In a similar vein, Donald E. Weatherbee also argued that in the quest for leadership, Indonesia was actually a wounded phoenix that cannot soar too high since it had to struggle with ASEAN's internal divisive-

³² Paige Johnson Tan, "Navigating A Turbulent Ocean: Indonesia's Worldview and Foreign Policy", *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 31(3), 2007, 147-181.

³³ Rizal Sukma, "Domestic Politics and International Posture: Constraints and Possibilities", in Reid (Ed.), *Indonesia Rising*, 90.

³⁴ Dewi Fortuna Anwar, "ASEAN and Indonesia: Some Reflections", *Asian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 5(1), 1997, 20-34.

ness, either by some members close attachment to certain major powers as well as differences and tensions among the member states, despite of Indonesia's bright idea to create ASEAN Security Community. He even suggested that should Indonesia wish to pursue its leadership, the investment should be made on nurturing relationships with its immediate neighbors, rather than on ASEAN as a whole.³⁵

Indonesia's later frustration with its fellow members in ASEAN, either because bilateral tension over certain territorial claims or the stubbornness of some members to implement the standard on human rights implementation also emboldened the view that Indonesia needs a post-ASEAN foreign policy which would enable Indonesia to soar high at the global arena in order to serve its national interests better.³⁶

Externally, the challenges to Indonesia's course to leadership can come from different areas. There can be a hypothetical situation where Indonesia's effort to build its leadership is halted because the major powers in the region are growing in power and stepped Indonesia in between. But, this might not be the case, in my view, due to the growing interdependence international system, while major powers cannot maintain their positions without acknowledging and interacting with others, including smaller powers.

The other external challenge, which I think more crucial, is the perception of other countries, especially the neighboring countries, on the form of Indonesia's leadership, whether it will be a dominating and aggressive power or a benevolent one. However, it is quite difficult to find the data on the perceptions of other countries on the possibility of Indonesia to become the next leader in the region.

Nevertheless, I attempt to gather some cases in another area on to what extent the other countries, especially neighboring countries, look at Indonesia as a threat to their country. It is well noted that Southeast Asian countries before the establishment of ASEAN were having deep concern over Indonesia's potential to dominate the region if there were no external powers to check Indonesia's ambitions.³⁷ That was one of

³⁵ Donald E. Weatherbee, "Indonesian Foreign Policy: A Wounded Phoenix", *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2005, 150-170.

³⁶ Rizal Sukma, "Indonesia Needs a post-ASEAN Foreign Policy", *The Jakarta Post*, 30 June 2009.

³⁷ Shaun Narine, "ASEAN and the Management of Regional Security", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 71(2), 1998, 197.

important reasons why they agreed to Soeharto's initiative to create an 'integrated' Southeast Asia by forming the association. To some extent, such concern is still widely maintained by countries in the region.

Some smaller neighboring countries still maintain their concern about the possibility that Indonesia will be a dominating power due to its size and past history of its assertiveness, especially during the Old Order era.³⁸ A former diplomat from Singapore who now heads a well-known research institute in Singapore argued that Indonesia would continuously seeking for leadership within ASEAN as well as recognition as a leading emerging power at the global level, while at the same time raised concern on whether Indonesia would outgrow ASEAN due to certain calls that Indonesia should look beyond ASEAN.³⁹

The incident of 'little red dot', a term used Indonesian second President B.J. Habibie to address Singapore as a reply to the comment made by former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew to criticize the appointment of Habibie as the cause for the destabilization of the financial markets, indicated how the Singaporeans deeply concerned on how their neighboring giant perceived their country.⁴⁰ Malaysia, the other neighbor, often engaged in tension with Indonesia on several issues, such as treatment to Indonesian maid workers, territorial claims (for example Sebatik and Ambalat), or claims over the ownership of certain cultural heritage (batik, traditional dances). Should Indonesia proclaim its will to become leader in the region, it is no doubt that concern will come out from these countries.

The other neighboring country which is not part of ASEAN is Australia. The latest survey conducted by the Lowy Institute on Indonesia in 2012 revealed that while 41% think that Indonesia is more open compared to 15 years ago, however around 33% said that it was 'more of a threat' to Australia than 15 years ago when it was still under Soeharto dictatorship.⁴¹

³⁸ Anwar, "ASEAN and Indonesia," 23.

³⁹ Barry Desker, "Is Indonesia Outgrowing ASEAN?", *RSIS Commentaries*, No. 125/2010, 29 September 2010.

⁴⁰ See Mohan Srilal, "Singapore-Indonesia Ties Sink to Chilly Depths," *Asia Times Online*, 5 March 1999, accessed in June 2013 <http://www.atimes.com/se-asia/AC05Ae01.html>

⁴¹ Fergus Hanson, "Indonesia Poll 2012: Shattering Stereotypes: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," (Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2012), 7.

Within the wider region of the Asia Pacific, the country such as the United States seems to welcome Indonesia's leading initiatives in different issues, particularly as the third largest democracy in the world to taking a greater responsibility both at regional and global levels. In her speech back in 2009 when meeting with Indonesia's Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda, Clinton mentioned that,

"Today, we renewed our commitment to build a comprehensive partnership based on mutual respect and mutual interests. We are working together on a number of common concerns for our two countries, the region, and the world. Indonesia and the United States share a vision for a peaceful and prosperous Southeast Asia. We also share a commitment to democratic values, human rights, and a vibrant civil society. The American people have the greatest respect for what the Indonesian people have accomplished in the last decade. Indonesia is now the world's third largest democracy, and it is taking the lead on a broad range of regional and international issues, including the promotion of democracy. Through their commitment to democracy, religious freedom, and women's rights, Indonesians uphold the values that President Obama described in his speech last week in Cairo, values that are fundamental – fundamental to Indonesia and the United States: justice, progress, tolerance."⁴²

Then, in her speech during the Third Meeting of the US-Indonesia Joint Commission in September 2012, State Secretary Clinton reiterated,

"...I also thanked the Minister for Indonesia's leadership in ASEAN. The Foreign Minister's personal leadership has helped lay the groundwork for diplomacy between ASEAN and China as it relates to the South China Sea. And we continue to support ASEAN's six-point principles, which we believe will help reduce tensions and pave the way for a comprehensive code of conduct for addressing disputes without threats, coercion, or use of force. Finally, Indonesia and the United States have stood together on a range of global challenges, from democratic reform in Burma to combating climate change, to working to end the violence in Syria... We believe that as the second and third-largest democracies in

⁴² Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks with Indonesian Foreign Minister Noer Hassan Wirajuda after Their Meeting," Washington DC, 8 June 2009, accessed in June 2013 <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/06/124461.htm>

the world, the United States and Indonesia have a special responsibility to promote democracy and human rights. And for the last four years, Indonesia has hosted the Bali Democracy Forum to promote peaceful, democratic transitions through example and open dialogue. Last year, more than 80 countries attended..."⁴³

From the more academic side, they also believed that Indonesia would one day become a leader, yet not in a near future due to the gap faced by the country. In one interview with Strategic Review Indonesia, Ernest Z. Bower argued that while there is no doubt that Indonesia is logically will and also wants to become a leader, but according to him its "software is catching up with the hardware".⁴⁴ Since there is no further elaboration to explain his statement, I assume that this 'hardware' refers to the various internal challenges that still prevents Indonesia from taking off to achieve leadership in the region.

Other major state like China also welcomed Indonesia's increasing role both at regional and global level. According to one analyst, Indonesia's better position, thanks to its membership in G20 and a key actor in East Asia Summit, has pushed China to think Indonesia as her potential key regional partners. Besides having much interests in Indonesia's acquisition of natural resources as well as sheer size of population as a potential market for Chinese products, the Chinese government also paid attention to Indonesia's growing power and independent posture, as it also maintains its relations with the United States, to play its unique role with China.⁴⁵

Conclusion

This paper does not intend to discourage the possibility that Indonesia will become a leader since it has been blessed with qualities to become one, such as its strategic location, resources, populations, and so on. However, such material resources would mean nothing without a good vision as well as well strategic thinking on how to achieve it.

⁴³ Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks with Indonesian Foreign Minister Raden Mohammad Marty Muliana Natalegawa after Their Meeting," Washington, DC, 20 September 2012, accessed in June 2013 <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2012/09/197993.htm>

⁴⁴ "Five Questions: Ernest Z. Bower", *Strategic Review*, 2011, accessed in June 2013 <http://www.sr-indonesia.com/2011-08-09-22-09-10/qanda/152-five-questions-ernest-z-bower>

⁴⁵ Christine Susanna Tjhin, "China-RI Partnership at Crossroad", *The Jakarta Post*, 27 March 2012.

While it is widely believed that Indonesia is a natural leader, due to its territorial and population size, such position seems hard to be achieved in the near future. The first reason is at the ideational level, the elites have not seriously incorporated the aspiration of leadership into a grand strategy in Indonesia's foreign policy, which is indicated by elaborating the clear steps on how to achieve to that end. Even worse, Indonesia's foreign policy is lacking of focus in order to meet its core national interests.

The second reason, despite of various activities which may indicate gestures in showing leadership, however Indonesia has not been able to regain significant respect from its fellow ASEAN member countries as it has hardly been able to unite ASEAN. On the other side, Indonesia has also yet gained a special attention among the major powers in East Asia as its effort to make the major powers to accommodate ASEAN centrality is yet to be taken up at fullest. Also, the result of Indonesia's role as a norm promoter, i.e. to project democracy through Bali Democracy Forum is still yet to be seen.

Third, leadership involves wide acceptance from other parties. While some major countries, such as the United States and China, rhetorically accepted Indonesia's aspiration to play a greater role in the region, some smaller neighboring countries are still having some concern whether Indonesia would become a dominating power in its paths toward achieving its leadership. Nevertheless, it is no longer a matter of choice whether Indonesia should or should not play a bigger role at the global context, but the question is how to realize that with the supports from the countries in the region.

Finally, since the election is coming up in 2014, the future course of Indonesia is going to rely heavily on the upcoming national leader whether he or she will be able to bring out the potentials owned by this country to build the foundations for Indonesia's leadership in the region. Leadership cannot be achieved in one night, but rather a process to be nurtured from time to time.