

The Incredible Shrinking Indonesia by Donald E. Weatherbee

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Still available on DVD, the 1957 science fiction cult film *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, based on Richard Matheson's novel *The Shrinking Man*, chronicled the gradual dwindling in size of the hero, Scott Carey, from a robust six-footer to prey for the family's cat. The cause of Scott's misfortune was mist from a strange Pacific Ocean cloud passing over his boat. With tongue in cheek, we can place Indonesia's international image and influence in Scott's position. The mysterious cloud that drifted over the Indonesian ship of state was the 2014 Indonesian election and its transforming mist the votes that elected Joko Widodo – "Jokowi" – president.

It was well known that the new president had no foreign policy credentials and little international relations experience. Unlike his predecessor, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), Jokowi had no vision of Indonesia's regional and global role. Now, halfway through his term, it does not seem that the lacunae left in Indonesia's *bebas dan aktif* ("free and active") foreign policy by electoral change have been filled. Unlike SBY, Jokowi has not taken to the international stage as a cheerleader and promoter of Indonesia's global profile. On the contrary, the mass execution of hapless drug mules, despite the pleas of world leaders, limned Jokowi's moral insularity when compared, for example, to the aspirations of SBY's Bali Democracy Forum.

Regionally, Jokowi's interest and influence in ASEAN is questioned. Nor does the current Indonesian foreign minister seem to have the political weight to assert – as her two predecessors did – Indonesia's regional leadership through ASEAN. It is difficult to imagine Retno Marsudi forcing unpalatable commitments on fellow foreign ministers as Hassan Wirayuda did with the human rights provisions of the ASEAN Charter; or riding to the rescue of an ASEAN consensus as Marty Natalegawa did with his 2012 salvaging of the Cambodia-hosted foreign ministers' meeting. With no real presidential commitment to ASEAN comparable to that of SBY, rather than being an Indonesian mover and shaker, Retno seems more of a place holder.

The changed Indonesian role in ASEAN can be seen in Jakarta's reaction to the spring 2015 replay of the seaborne exodus of Myanmar's oppressed Rohingya ethnic minority. In the 2012 Rohingya crisis, Indonesia proactively sought to intervene with both SBY and Foreign Minister Marty calling it an ASEAN problem. The president explicitly expressed solidarity with the Rohingya and Marty called on Myanmar to seek a humanitarian resolution that respected the political rights of the Rohingya. In 2015, however, there was silence from both the presidential palace and the foreign ministry on

the sources of the problem. Indonesia passively accepted Myanmar's insistence that the Rohingya should not be discussed as such either in official ASEAN settings or the Thai-sponsored May "Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean."

What is beginning to look like Jokowi's more nationalist and bilaterally focused foreign policy may be a harbinger of what might be characterized as a post-ASEAN foreign policy, one in which national interests are defined independent of the obligations of ASEAN. In this scenario, the decades-long ASEAN cornerstone of Indonesian foreign policy crumbles. While it has become a truism that ASEAN needs Indonesia more than Indonesia needs ASEAN, Indonesia's once leading role in ASEAN contributed to its international visibility and importance. ASEAN's claim of "centrality" in regional international relations has rested in large measure on Indonesia's centrality in ASEAN. Any significant loosening of Indonesia's ASEAN ties without offsetting alternatives would contribute to the "shrinking" process, increasing its vulnerability, not to a family cat, but a prowling dragon.

Jokowi's scheduled October visit to Washington and meeting with President Obama will be an opportunity to gauge anew a bilateral relationship that since 2004 had featured a very visible Indonesia whose president was at home globally. One measure will be whether new life and vigor can be infused into the United States – Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership or whether it simply becomes diplomatic detritus from the SBY era. If the latter, at least from a US vantage point, Indonesia will shrink a little more.

PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.