

Indonesia's Ascent: Power, Leadership, and the Regional Order.
Edited by Christopher B. Roberts, Ahmad D. Habir and Leonard C. Sebastian. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Hardcover: 372pp.

Indonesia has made enormous strides over the past fifteen years. It emerged from authoritarian control, turned around an ailing economy and transformed itself into a regional powerhouse characterized by greater political stability, economic growth, democratic values and more confidence on the world stage. The international community now speaks of the country's remarkable rise using terms such as "potential Great Power" and "pivotal state" — descriptions far removed from the disintegration of the state some naysayers predicted after 1998. As a direct result of these trends, some commentators have begun to ask whether Indonesia could be a state capable of influencing international affairs, that is, a "Great Power", particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

Indonesia's ascent demands closer examination. With a decade of relative stability and growth under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, it is up to his successor, President Joko Widodo, or Jokowi as he prefers to be called, to manage, sustain and direct the country's rise. Despite early wins by reducing fuel subsidies, questions remain about his management of security and legal affairs, evidenced by his attempted appointment of a graft suspect as chief of police in early 2015. With a population of 240 million, and a growing gap between the rich and the poor, Jokowi must focus on infrastructure upgrades and better social services, the progress of which was seen to have stagnated under Yudhoyono. Tepid economic growth rates in late 2014 and early 2015 suggest that Indonesia could run out of steam. Indonesia must also negotiate an evolving Asia-Pacific security environment made problematic by a more assertive China, an ASEAN lurching towards economic integration, and a United States whose relative power and influence is perceived to be in decline. Will Indonesia be able to meet these challenges?

Indonesia's Ascent: Power, Leadership, and the Regional Order is a sixteen-chapter edited volume that grapples directly with the question of whether Indonesia will be a major power. Penned by academics, experts and former practitioners based in Australia, Indonesia and Singapore, the book delivers scholarly but accessible accounts of the country's transformation since 1998 in key areas

such as political stability, economics, the standing of Islam in the country, internal and external security threats, foreign policy, Indonesia's relations with ASEAN and the Great Powers and Jakarta's maritime policies. One of the book's strengths is that some of these areas are examined across multiple chapters by various authors, allowing for greater comparison of perspectives from within and without Indonesia. With power being the central theme, the book draws inspiration from International Relations scholarship but avoids getting entangled in theoretical discussions.

Several chapters are prefaced with a brief historical overview from which the reader gains a fuller appreciation on how much (or how little) Indonesian thinking has evolved in certain areas. One good example is Chapter Fifteen, by Leonard C. Sebastian, Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto and I. Made Andi Arsana, which examines Indonesia's maritime domain, beginning with a discussion of how the Dutch emphasized the importance of securing waterways. This, in turn, influenced the concept of Indonesia's archipelagic outlook. This reveals in more detail the historical foundation of Jokowi's emphasis on transforming Indonesia into a "global maritime axis" and the need to strenuously protect its sovereignty and maritime rights and interests. Indeed, his policy of destroying foreign vessels caught fishing illegally in the country's exclusive economic zone might appear extreme to some observers, and indeed has become a vexatious issue in Indonesia's relations with its neighbours. Yet, against the backdrop described in Chapter Fifteen, but also Chapter Two by Sue Thompson on Indonesian sensitivity to foreign intervention, the domestic appeal of such policies is rendered clear. Occasional reminders about Indonesia's vulnerability to external forces — including Dutch colonialism, Japanese occupation during World War II and CIA backing for certain separatist movements in the 1960s — allow for a more empathetic reading of Indonesia's actions.

Often commentators discussing Indonesia's potential as a great power fail to acknowledge the importance of domestic factors. Of the chapters on domestic issues, there are two worth highlighting: the first, on Indonesia's economic prospects which is a key determinant of Indonesia's ability to develop both hard and soft power (Chapter Three by Satish Mishra), and the other on the potential stagnation of democratic development which is often held up as an example of a successful transition away from authoritarianism (Chapter Six by Stephen Sherlock). Mishra's chapter offers a necessarily sober view of long-term macroeconomic shortcomings such as the need for

regulatory reform, the lack of state revenue collection, the variable quality of education, and the ability for the economy to adequately diversify. Also useful is Sherlock's chapter which makes explicit what other chapters allude to, which is that Indonesia's ascent could be greatly undermined by institutional weaknesses such as the political party system. Both these chapters make salient points that should infuse public discussion about Indonesia's growth trajectory. Too often, contemporary commentary on Indonesia's rise glosses over internal weaknesses, producing too optimistic a view of the country's potential.

There are only a few minor criticisms of the book worth noting. First is the heavy emphasis on Australia–Indonesia relations, which is covered in two chapters. There is risk of fatigue with this topic; recurrent troubles in the relationship have been well studied. More useful would have been a chapter on Indonesia's relationship with other middle and emerging Asia-Pacific powers such as China, India and Russia.

Also, there is overlap between chapters on Indonesia foreign and strategic policy which form roughly half of the book. Other areas of interest might have included a discussion on religious freedom, women's rights, and the media, as indicators of the quality of democracy, freedom of speech and human rights within the country. Given that the interplay between domestic issues and international standing was discussed in several chapters, it would have been complementary to examine issues pertinent to Indonesia such as civil-military relations, human rights and, in light of ongoing issues with the haze, environmental security.

Indonesia's Ascent is useful for a range of audiences, not least for an epistemic community in need of finer detail about the country's domestic conditions and Indonesia's perspectives on international affairs. Indonesia-focused academics searching for analyses slightly outside of their field of study will find many chapters enriching, as well as those with a general interest in the country.

NATALIE SAMBHI is an Analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), Canberra, and Managing Editor of ASPI's blog, *The Strategist*. Postal address: Level 2, 40 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600, Australia; email: nataliesambhi@aspi.org.au.