



OVERHAULING THE MACHINE: BUREAUCRATIC REFORM AND FOREIGN POLICY MAKING IN POST-AUTHORITARIAN INDONESIA, 1998–2009

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana reformasi Kementerian Luar Negeri Indonesia pasca-1998 membentuk ulang kapasitas negara dalam merumuskan dan menjalankan kebijakan luar negeri. Kajian tentang kebijakan luar negeri Indonesia cenderung menjelaskan perubahan melalui figur pemimpin atau tekanan sistemik, sehingga dimensi kelembagaan birokrasi yang menjembatani keduanya kurang mendapat perhatian. Dengan berfokus pada reformasi sistematis yang dijalankan Menteri Luar Negeri Hassan Wirajuda (2001–2009), artikel ini berargumen bahwa reformasi tersebut merupakan proses strukturisasi yang digerakkan oleh interaksi antara agen-agen reformis dan kondisi demokratisasi pasca-otoritarianisme. Dengan memanfaatkan sumber primer berupa wawancara pejabat dan basis data perjanjian bilateral, artikel ini mengajukan tiga temuan: reformasi tersebut menegaskan kembali kontrol sipil profesional atas perumusan kebijakan luar negeri; menghasilkan kapasitas kelembagaan baru untuk menjalankan dan mendiversifikasi hubungan bilateral; dan memungkinkan revitalisasi hubungan Indonesia–Rusia. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada historiografi diplomasi Indonesia serta pada studi yang lebih luas mengenai bagaimana demokratisasi membentuk ulang arsitektur kelembagaan kebijakan luar negeri.

Kata kunci: Reformasi Birokrasi, Kebijakan Luar Negeri, Indonesia Pasca Otoritarianisme, Metodologi Strukturalis, Demokratisasi

ABSTRACT

This article examines how the post-1998 reform of Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs reshaped the state's capacity to formulate and conduct foreign policy. Studies of Indonesian foreign policy have tended to explain change through either individual leaders or systemic pressures, leaving the bureaucratic institutions that mediate between the two relatively underexplored. Focusing on Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda's systematic overhaul (2001–2009), the article argues that this overhaul was a structuring process driven by the interplay between reformist agents and the conditions of post-authoritarian democratization. Drawing on primary sources including ministerial interviews and a bilateral treaty database, it advances three findings: the reform reasserted professional civilian control over foreign policy formulation; generated new institutional capacity to conduct and diversify bilateral relations; and enabled the revitalization of Indonesia–Russia relation. The article contributes to the historiography of Indonesian diplomacy and to the broader study of how democratization reshapes the institutional architecture of foreign policy.

Keywords: Bureaucratic Reform, Foreign Policy, Post-Authoritarian Indonesia, Structuralist Methodology, Democratization

BACKGROUND

The fall of President Suharto on 21 May 1998 (Aspinall, 2005; Hill, 1999) initiated a process of political transformation whose consequences extended well beyond the immediate domains of electoral politics and civil liberties. Among the less examined yet deeply consequential effects of Indonesia's democratic transition was the restructuring of the state bureaucracy responsible for formulating and implementing foreign policy. For more than three decades under the New Order regime (1966–1998), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Departemen Luar Negeri, later Kementerian Luar Negeri) had operated within institutional constraints that severely limited its autonomy: Suharto and the military effectively controlled the formulation of foreign policy directions, reducing the Ministry to an executor of presidentially defined ideological parameters (Nabbs-Keller, 2013). The President monopolized strategic direction (Anwar, 1994), military officers occupied key bureaucratic positions through the doctrine of dual function, *dwifungsi* ABRI (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2010; Wirajuda, 2025), and the ideological apparatus of the state subordinated diplomatic practice to the imperatives of anti-communist vigilance and regime consolidation (Bandoro, 1984; Suryadinata, 2006). The end of authoritarian rule did not automatically dismantle these arrangements. Rather, it altered the domestic conditions of foreign policymaking, opening a space in which reformist agents inside the Ministry could begin to act upon and reshape the institutional structures they had inherited (de Archellie et al., 2024; He, 2008; Sukma, 1995).

The most comprehensive effort to transform this institutional architecture was the systematic overhaul undertaken during the tenure of Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda (2001–2009). Wirajuda described his reform program in terms that deliberately evoked mechanical transformation: the Ministry was to be 'overhauled' like an engine, with its structure reorganized, its mission redefined, and its corporate culture fundamentally altered (Wirajuda, 2025). The overhaul encompassed structural

reorganization, the redefinition of diplomatic mission from multilateral predominance toward a balanced bilateral–regional–multilateral orientation, a revolutionary personnel policy that bypassed seniority conventions, and a cultural shift from hierarchical detachment toward citizen service. Yet despite its scope and significance, the overhaul has received remarkably little sustained analytical attention. Nabbs-Keller (2013) has examined the organizational reform of the Foreign Ministry, but primarily through a lens focused on policy outcomes rather than on the internal process of institutional transformation itself. Wibisono (2009) comes closer to the internal apparatus, cataloguing the 2003 restructuring of the Department of Foreign Affairs: the reorganization of the directorates-general along combined regional and forum-based lines, the creation of directorates for public diplomacy and for the protection of citizens, and what he describes as a make-over of the Department’s organizational culture. Yet these changes are recorded descriptively, as one strand of a broader study of political elites and democratization, rather than analyzed as a process in which reformist agents reshaped the structures they had inherited. Studies of post-Reformasi Indonesian foreign policy have documented democratization’s impact on foreign policy orientation (Xue & He, 2022) and the role of new actors such as the legislature, civil society, and transnational Islamic non-state actors (Alles, 2016), yet none has systematically examined how the internal bureaucratic transformation of the Ministry itself reconfigured the institutional conditions under which foreign policy is made.

This gap raises a set of interrelated questions that this article seeks to address. How did the overhaul of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reshape the institutional conditions of Indonesian foreign policymaking after 1998? Through what mechanisms did the interplay between reformist agents and the enabling yet constraining structures of post-authoritarian democratization produce a qualitatively different bureaucratic configuration? And how did this transformed institutional architecture

concretely affect Indonesia's bilateral diplomacy, particularly with partners that had been rendered inaccessible under the previous regime?

The article approaches the overhaul as a process of institutional change situated at the intersection of internal bureaucratic reform and the agency–structure relationship in foreign policymaking. Rather than treating reform as the optimizing response of a unitary rational actor or as the product of an individual leader's disposition, it reads the transformation through the bureaucratic-politics strand of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), in which policy and its governing institutions emerge from the interaction of agents and the structures that both enable and constrain them (Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Kaarbo, 2015). The reformist agents who drove the overhaul were themselves products of the very institution they sought to transform; their capacity for action was simultaneously enabled and constrained by the post-authoritarian, democratizing conditions that surrounded them. The revitalization of Indonesia–Russia relations—a bilateral relationship frozen throughout the New Order by ideological barriers and reopened through new institutional capacities—serves as the empirical case that makes these causal mechanisms visible.

The empirical base draws on primary sources including transcripts of research interviews with former Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda and former Ambassador Hamid Awaluddin; bilateral treaty documents from the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Treaty Database and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; presidential speeches (*pidato kenegaraan*) from the Megawati Sukarnoputri presidency (2001–2004); the collected speeches of the Foreign Minister compiled in the *Kumpulan Pidato Menteri Luar Negeri* volumes for 2002, 2004, 2007, 2008, and 2009, in particular the internal addresses delivered at the inauguration of Ministry officials (*pelantikan pejabat*), the closing of diplomat training (*Diklat Sesparlu* and *Sesdilu*), and ministerial work meetings and annual statements (*rapat kerja*), which serve to corroborate and cross-check the retrospective interview material; and secondary literature in both

Indonesian and English on post-authoritarian institutional reform. The article proceeds in a broadly chronological manner, moving from the inherited structure of the New Order's foreign policy apparatus through the critical juncture of reform to the consolidation of new institutional practices, before examining how these changes manifested in the Indonesia–Russia bilateral relationship.

This article makes three contributions. *First*, it reconstructs the institutional history of Indonesia's foreign policy bureaucracy across the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. *Second*, it demonstrates the analytical value of a bureaucratic-politics approach centered on the agency–structure relationship for studying institutional change in foreign policymaking, offering an alternative to the rational-choice and leader-centered, behavioral approaches that have dominated the analysis of foreign policy decisions. *Third*, it provides empirical illustration of how bureaucratic reform concretely affected bilateral diplomacy, revealing the causal connections between domestic institutional transformation and the reopening of diplomatic possibilities that had been foreclosed under the previous regime. The objective of this study is to explain how the overhaul of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a process of institutional change driven by the interplay of agency and structure under democratizing conditions, transformed the institutional architecture of Indonesian diplomacy and created the conditions for the revitalization of bilateral relationships that the New Order's configuration had rendered impossible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding how the post-1998 bureaucratic reform of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reshaped the country's foreign policymaking process requires a deliberate choice about where, within the broad field of FPA, the explanation should be sought. That choice is not self-evident, and it is argued here that the two currents most often associated with FPA are ill-suited to the task. The rational-

choice tradition, which treats the state as a unitary actor optimizing against exogenous incentives, abstracts away the very institution that is doing the reforming; the behavioral and psychologically oriented tradition, which locates explanation in the cognition, personality, and perceptions of individual decision-makers, relocates the analysis to the level of the leader and away from the apparatus (Alden & Aran, 2017). Neither captures what the Indonesian case is about, namely the reconfiguration of a diplomatic bureaucracy and the conditions under which that reconfiguration became possible. This review therefore positions the study within the bureaucratic-politics strand of FPA and within the domestic conditions of Indonesia's post-Reformasi order. The analytical emphasis falls on process and condition rather than on the calculus of a rational actor or the psychology of a single decision-maker.

FPA established itself as the subfield of International Relations (IR) that opens the "black box" of the state, insisting that international outcomes are ultimately grounded in human beings acting within, and upon, institutional and social structures (Alden & Aran, 2017; Hudson, 2005; Hudson & Day, 2020). Its defining commitment is actor-specific and agent-oriented, but this is not a claim that agents are unconstrained. Agency operates within structures that both enable and constrain action, and those structures are in turn reproduced and altered through the actions of agents. It is precisely here that the agency-structure relationship becomes analytically central to the study of a foreign ministry, directing attention to the interplay between reformist agents and the institutional arrangements they inhabit. Kaarbo (2015) captures the wider significance of this move in her account of the "domestic politics turn" across IR theory, noting that mainstream approaches increasingly acknowledge domestic and decision-making factors while largely neglecting the decades of FPA scholarship that had already specified how such unit-level dynamics shape policy.

The structural counterpart to this agent-oriented ontology is supplied by the bureaucratic-politics tradition. In its classic formulations, governmental decisions are

understood not as the choices of a coherent actor but as the result of bargaining among organizations and officials, each carrying distinct interests, standard operating procedures, and institutional positions (Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Halperin et al., 2006). The tradition's well-known aphorism that where one stands depends on where one sits has a direct corollary for the study of reform: altering a ministry is never a purely technical exercise but a contest among entrenched interests and cultures. This insight connects to a distinct body of work on the foreign ministry as an institution capable of change. Rather than accepting the recurrent thesis that foreign ministries are in decline, this literature examines how such institutions adapt to shifting domestic and international pressures, and how organizational culture mediates their responses (Hocking, 1993). Taken together, these strands establish that bureaucratic reform is possible, contested, and shaped by inherited institutional structures—though the evidence base is drawn overwhelmingly from established, largely Western democracies.

A fourth body of scholarship addresses democratization and foreign policy, and it is here that the Indonesian case has received most attention. The core claim is that regime change reshapes who participates in foreign policymaking and how policy is produced. He (2008) models post-Suharto foreign policy through an international pressure–political legitimacy framework, showing how democratization altered the country's external conduct. Rüländ (2017, 2018, 2021) documents how the Reformasi opened foreign policymaking to a wider set of stakeholders—parliament, civil society, and Islamic actors—reshaping the country's foreign-policy role concepts while also revealing the ambiguities and, more recently, the backsliding that accompany democratic governance of external relations. Sukma (2011) characterizes the same period as a new democracy finding a distinctive voice. Reviewing this scholarship as a whole, Wicaksana and Karim (2022) trace the evolution of Indonesian foreign-policy studies through two stages—an earlier area-studies orientation and a later, more

explicitly theory-driven inquiry—and identify aspects of the subject that remain comparatively overlooked.

Read against the specific problem of this article, each of these literatures stops short in a revealing way. FPA's agency-structure insight, though foundational, is rarely operationalized at the level of the ministry as an institution actively undergoing reform; it is more commonly deployed to explain discrete decisions than to explain structural self-transformation. The bureaucratic-politics tradition, for its part, is built predominantly on established democracies and tends to analyze bargaining around particular policy choices rather than the internal politics of reforming the apparatus itself. The democratization-and-foreign-policy literature on Indonesia, meanwhile, treats democratization largely as an input that produces changes in policy outputs and role conceptions; it explains what changed in policy far more fully than it explains how the policymaking apparatus was internally reformed and with what agentic dynamics. The handful of works that do turn to the Ministry's internal apparatus tend to document the reform rather than analyze it as a process. Wibisono (2009), for example, catalogues the 2003 restructuring of the directorates-general and the reshaping of the Ministry's organizational culture, but as one component of a broader account of political elites and democratization rather than as an agency-structure dynamic unfolding over time. The result is that the internal reform process of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, understood as a sequence of agentic action within and upon inherited institutional structure unfolding under the particular constraints of the post-Reformasi state, falls in the space between these bodies of work. What remains under-examined is precisely the process and the conditions: how reform-minded agents inside the ministry acted within structures they had inherited, and how the domestic conditions of a democratizing, resource-constrained, and still-consolidating polity both enabled and bounded what they could achieve.

This article responds to that gap by analyzing the post-1998 reform of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a process of institutional change located at the intersection of internal reform and agency-structure relations. Instead of modelling reform as rational optimization or reducing it to the cognition of individual leaders, it foregrounds the interaction between agents—reform-minded diplomats, ministers, and bureaucratic factions—and the structures they simultaneously worked within and reshaped, including the ministry’s organizational culture, its inherited New Order arrangements, and the constitutional and legal frameworks governing the executive. It reads these interactions as conditioned by the democratizing environment of the Reformasi era, which supplied both the impetus for reform and the constraints within which reform had to proceed. In doing so, the article extends the bureaucratic-politics strand of FPA to a non-Western, democratizing case, and connects it to the democratization-and-foreign-policy literature at the level where the two most productively meet: the policymaking process itself, examined through its conditions rather than through the choices of a unitary or purely psychological actor.

METHODOLOGY

This article analyses the post-1998 overhaul of Indonesia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the lens of FPA, operationalized as a qualitative, single-case study reconstructed by means of process-tracing (Beach & Pedersen, 2019). FPA is distinctive within IR for its agent-oriented, actor-specific commitment: it holds that foreign policy and the institutions that produce it are ultimately grounded in human beings acting within, and upon, organizational and domestic-political structures (Alden & Aran, 2017; Hudson & Day, 2020). Two of its strands are combined here. The bureaucratic-politics strand treats policy and institutional outcomes as the product of bargaining among officials and organizations whose interests and positions are defined by the structures they occupy (Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Halperin et al., 2006), while the

broader domestic-politics turn in FPA supplies the analytical vocabulary for relating unit-level agency to the political conditions that enable and constrain it (Kaarbo, 2015). The task of the analysis is therefore not merely to narrate what changed and when, but to explain how and why, attending simultaneously to the intentions of reformist actors, the structural conditions within which they operated, and the ways in which their actions reconfigured those conditions for subsequent actors.

This approach was chosen for three reasons that relate directly to the research questions posed in the introduction. *First*, those questions ask how the interplay between reformist agents and post-authoritarian structures produced a qualitatively different bureaucratic configuration. Answering them requires a method that holds both agency and structure in simultaneous analytical view without reducing one to the other. An account focused solely on Wirajuda's leadership decisions would capture his agency but fail to explain why that agency took the specific institutional form it did; an account focused solely on the systemic pressures of democratization would explain why reform occurred but not why it assumed this particular configuration rather than another. FPA's agent-oriented framework, precisely because it situates decision-makers within the bureaucratic and domestic-political structures that shape their choices, allows the analysis to trace how the agent's intentions were formed by the structure he inhabited and how his actions in turn reshaped that structure. Process-tracing operationalizes this by reconstructing, step by step, the causal chain linking structural conditions, agentic choices, and institutional outcomes.

Second, an FPA approach centered on the agency–structure relationship is particularly well suited to the analysis of institutional transformation during political transitions, because such moments make visible the normally latent relationship between agents and the structures they inhabit. Under stable authoritarian conditions, institutional structures appear fixed, and agents appear to have little room for maneuver. During transitions, by contrast, the constraining power of old structures

weakens while new structures have not yet consolidated, creating a period of heightened agency in which reformist actors can undertake transformations that would have been impossible under the previous regime. Yet even in such moments agents do not act from a position of structural weightlessness: they carry with them the dispositions, skills, and networks formed under the old order, and the reforms they undertake are shaped by the specific character of the transition they are living through. The overhaul of Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs after 1998 exemplifies this dynamic precisely. Wirajuda entered the Ministry in 1973 under the old regime, experienced military screening during recruitment, and rose through a career track shaped by New Order institutional priorities, yet acted upon the structural possibilities opened by Reformasi to produce an institutional outcome that the old structure could not have generated.

Third, this framework provides concrete guidance for investigating the reform process through empirical materials. Following the actor-specific logic of FPA and the procedures of process-tracing, the analysis attends to the specific configuration of the foreign ministry, the distribution of authority between the president and other institutional actors, the role of the military within civilian bureaucracies, and how democratization altered these elements simultaneously — treating no single element as determinative but understanding all of them as causally interactive, and searching within the case for the observable evidence of how each shaped the others over time.

The empirical base of this study draws on primary sources from four categories. *First*, semi-structured research interviews with two key informants: former Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda (2025), who designed and implemented the overhaul, and former Ambassador Hamid Awaluddin (2024), who served as Ambassador to the Russian Federation (2008–2011) and implemented the reformed Ministry's approach in a specific bilateral context. *Second*, the collected speeches of the Foreign Minister compiled in the *Himpunan Pidato Menteri Luar Negeri* volumes for 2002, 2004, 2007,

2008, and 2009, in particular the internal addresses delivered at the inauguration of Ministry officials, the closing of diplomat training, and ministerial work meetings and annual statements. Because the interview material is retrospective and therefore vulnerable to hindsight coherence and self-presentation, these contemporaneous addresses serve as a triangulation source, corroborating and cross-checking the interview account against what the Minister articulated while the reform was under way. *Third*, official documents including bilateral treaties and agreements from the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Treaty Database and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs portal (mid.ru), as well as presidential speeches from the Megawati Sukarnoputri presidency (2001–2004). *Fourth*, secondary literature in both Indonesian and English on post-authoritarian institutional reform, Indonesian foreign policy, and Indonesia–Russia bilateral relations. The case of Indonesia–Russia relations was selected because the bilateral relationship had been frozen for over three decades not by strategic incompatibility but by the institutional configuration of the Indonesian state, making it a case where institutional change, rather than shifts in strategic interests or leadership preferences, constitutes the primary explanatory variable for diplomatic revitalization.

The article proceeds in a broadly chronological manner, moving from the inherited structure of the New Order's foreign policy apparatus through the critical juncture of reform to the consolidation of new institutional practices, before examining how these changes manifested in the Indonesia–Russia bilateral relationship. This organization reflects the process-tracing logic of the analysis, which requires sustained attention to the temporal dimension of institutional change: bureaucratic structures are not static configurations but evolving arrangements whose transformation can only be understood through attention to sequence, timing, and the cumulative effects of agentic action over time.

DISCUSSION

The Inherited Structure: The Foreign Policy Apparatus under the New Order

The reform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs cannot be read as a departure from a neutral baseline. It has to be read against the specific bureaucratic-political configuration that reformist agents inherited, because that configuration defined the positions, interests, standard operating procedures, and organizational culture from which any reform would have to proceed. In the vocabulary of bureaucratic politics, where an official sits determines where that official stands, and the New Order apparatus had fixed those seats in ways that made certain diplomatic options not merely unattractive but institutionally unthinkable. Three interlocking features defined the inherited structure: presidential monopoly over strategic direction, military penetration of the civilian bureaucracy, and the ideological subordination of diplomacy to domestic security imperatives. Reconstructing them is the necessary first step in a process-traced account, because each would later operate both as a constraint on reformist agency and as an object that reform sought to remake.

The first feature was the President's monopoly over strategic direction. Throughout the New Order, the Foreign Minister occupied a subordinate position within the executive, functioning as a technocratic executor rather than an autonomous policy entrepreneur. The succession of civilian foreign ministers from Adam Malik to Ali Alatas did not alter this structural dependency. The Ministry could administer diplomacy, but it could not initiate or redirect it without presidential sanction (Anwar, 1994). The standard operating procedure of the institution was, in effect, the implementation of parameters defined elsewhere.

The second feature was the penetration of the civilian bureaucracy by the military. Under the doctrine of *dwifungsi* ABRI, officers occupied key positions throughout the Ministry. As Wirajuda recounted, the Secretary-General, Inspector-General, and Directors-General posts were dominated by military appointees, and one

directorate was tasked with screening nationals returning from communist-bloc countries. In his characterization, the Ministry had been taken over by the military (Wirajuda, 2025). This was not a matter of personnel alone; it embedded a security-oriented logic in the organizational culture of diplomacy. Recruitment itself carried this orientation. Wirajuda recalled that his 1973 screening interviews included doctrinal questions such as whether the 1945 Constitution could be amended and whether *dwifungsi* ABRI would continue, with the expected answers later overturned by the very reforms he would help implement. His retrospective account is used here as evidence of the inherited configuration, and its reliability is addressed below through comparison with the contemporaneous record.

The third feature was the ideological subordination of diplomacy. Relations with the Soviet Union were reduced to a minimal level after 1965. Diplomatic ties were never formally severed, and six Soviet ambassadors served between 1969 and 1991, but the relationship was effectively frozen. The institutional consequence was decisive for the present study: an entire category of diplomatic relationships was rendered inaccessible regardless of strategic benefit. When the United States imposed arms restrictions in October 1992, the response was not to seek alternative suppliers from the former Soviet bloc but to work within the existing Western framework, a choice that reveals how tightly the inherited structure bounded the field of the conceivable.

These three features formed a mutually reinforcing configuration. The collapse of oil prices after 1982 created pressures for diversifying international partnerships (Gately, 1986; Thee, 2012), yet the apparatus prevented such diversification from extending to ideologically proscribed partners. The result, in Anwar's (1994) terms, was a foreign policy apparatus that was institutionally subordinate, ideologically constrained, and strategically narrow. This was the structure that would both constrain and be reshaped by the reformist agency examined in the sections that follow.

The Conditions for Reform: *Reformasi* and the Space for Institutional Change

If the inherited structure set the constraints, the political transition of 1998 altered the conditions under which agency could operate. The upheaval did not itself reform the Ministry. It dismantled the structural supports that had held the old configuration in place, widening the space for reformist action without dictating what that action would produce. In terms of FPA, the transition changed the domestic-political conditions that enable and constrain unit-level agency (Kaarbo, 2015), and it did so in three consequential ways.

The formal abolition of *dwifungsi* in 1999 expanded the institutional space for professional diplomats to occupy leadership roles. This was a structural rupture rather than gradual attrition. As Wirajuda observed, it meant not only the physical departure of military officers but the beginning of a cultural transformation, from military hierarchy and suspicion toward professional diplomacy and public service. The seats that *dwifungsi* had reserved were now open to be filled and redefined.

The constitutional amendments of 1999 to 2002 strengthened the legislature. Article 11, as amended, required presidential consultation with the DPR for significant international agreements, and *Komisi I*, the parliamentary committee for foreign affairs and defense, emerged as an active non-executive actor. De Archellie, Alkatiri, and Sunarti (2024) show that this created parallel channels of legislative diplomacy alongside the traditional executive channels. The Ministry could no longer operate as the silent executor of presidential directives, and coordination with a newly assertive legislature became part of its operating environment.

More broadly, democratization produced what Mietzner (2024) terms power dispersal. The principle of *bebas aktif* was reinterpreted from a defensive doctrine into a pragmatic orientation toward active engagement with all potential partners (Sukma, 1995), and He (2008) argues that democratization altered the domestic institutional environment as a whole, creating new actors, new constraints, and new opportunities.

That Wirajuda understood his own reform as a direct response to this transition can be established by triangulating the interview against the contemporaneous record. In 2025, he framed the overhaul as his answer to three simultaneous transformations, namely the domestic *Reformasi* of 1998 and 1999, the deepening of ASEAN, and the shift to a unipolar international order. He had said as much while in office. Addressing the inauguration of Ministry officials in 2004, he described the Ministry's *benah diri*, or self-rectification, as an integral part of the wider *reformasi birokrasi* then under way (Wirajuda, 2004). The convergence of the retrospective and the contemporaneous framings indicates that the reform was consciously calibrated to the conditions of the democratic transition rather than reconstructed as such after the fact.

These conditions made institutional transformation possible, but they did not determine its specific content. A widened space for agency is not yet a reform. What filled that space was the work of agents who possessed both institutional position and reformist vision, and it is to that agency that the analysis now turns.

The Overhaul: Wirajuda's Reform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Hassan Wirajuda assumed the position of Foreign Minister in August 2001. He described his program as an overhaul: 'we change the structure, we change the definition of its mission, and also the internal system, including personnel. But no less important is changing the culture, the corporate culture' (Wirajuda, 2025). The structural reorganization addressed the legacy of military penetration directly. Screening units monitoring nationals from communist-bloc countries were dismantled, and the Directorate-General for Information was reconceived as a vehicle for public diplomacy rather than ideological surveillance.

The redefinition of diplomatic mission rebalanced Indonesian diplomacy across bilateral, regional, and multilateral tracks, challenging an entrenched culture in which the multilateral corps was the elite career path. Wirajuda developed the concentric

circles framework: ASEAN and the Pacific in the first circle, major Asian powers in the second, and Europe, Russia, and more distant partners in the third. This served both strategic and bureaucratic functions, signaling that bilateral engagement was to be elevated in institutional priority.

Personnel reform was the most contested element. Wirajuda promoted fifteen diplomats to echelon-two positions at the unprecedented age of 38 to 39, including Marty Natalegawa, Retno Marsudi, and Dino Patti Djalal. The BKN initially rejected these appointments, withholding allowances for a year until Wirajuda composed detailed justifications. This episode illustrates a central dynamic: the reformist agent could act because the post-authoritarian structure permitted departures, yet that same structure contained inherited constraints requiring negotiation rather than unilateral imposition. Wirajuda also broadened recruitment to include foreign language specialists, among them Russian speakers, and initiated recruitment from Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*).

The transformation of corporate culture began with the Three Orders (*Tiga Tertib*): orderliness of time, physical environment, and security. More consequentially, Wirajuda elevated citizen service from a residual consular function to a core diplomatic mission, institutionalizing the principle of fast, easy, cheap, and friendly (*cepat, mudah, murah, ramah*) service through career incentives. In terms of the bureaucratic-politics and agent-oriented approach adopted here, the overhaul exemplifies the mutual constitution of agency and structure: agents shaped by the old structure acted within new structural conditions to produce an institutional configuration irreducible to either agency or structure alone.

The triangulation introduced above can be pursued most systematically for the overhaul itself, since this part of the account rests most heavily on the 2025 interview, a retrospective source vulnerable to hindsight coherence and self-presentation. Its central claims were therefore checked against Wirajuda's contemporaneous internal

addresses, delivered to Ministry audiences while the reform was under way and compiled in the *Himpunan Pidato Menteri Luar Negeri* volumes for 2004, 2007, 2008, and 2009. These addresses were given at the inauguration of Ministry officials, at the closing of diplomat training, and in the Minister's annual statements and work meetings. Because they were institutional communications addressed to serving diplomats rather than scholarly reconstructions, their convergence with the 2025 interview is strong evidence that the retrospective account reflects a reform program Wirajuda was already articulating in the same terms in office.

The convergence is close and specific. The interview's governing metaphor of an overhaul has a direct contemporaneous counterpart. Addressing the inauguration of consuls-general in February 2004, Wirajuda spoke of the constant need to repair and perfect the Ministry's diplomatic machine, and framed the ceremony itself as part of an ongoing *benah diri* already more than two years under way (Wirajuda, 2004). The four dimensions he enumerated in 2025, namely structure, mission, personnel, and culture, appear together in the annual statements, which describe *benah diri* as encompassing organizational restructuring of both the Ministry and overseas missions, the reordering of human resources and the diplomatic profession, and a shift in institutional culture toward mission attainment and public service (Wirajuda, 2008, 2009). The reorientation that the interview frames through the concentric-circles metaphor is stated plainly in office as restructuring directed at the balanced management of bilateral, regional, and multilateral affairs (Wirajuda, 2009). The Three Orders that the interview presents as the entry point of cultural reform recur in the same enumerated form in the annual statements (Wirajuda, 2008, 2009), and the merit-based recruitment the interview emphasizes is corroborated by contemporaneous figures, namely a clean, open, merit-oriented system that drew more than seventeen thousand applicants for roughly one hundred places in 2007 (Wirajuda, 2007, 2008). The closing address to the *Sesparlu* and *Sesdilu* cohorts ties the formation of reliable

and professional diplomats explicitly to the *benah diri* carried out since 2001, locating the reform's origin at precisely the date the interview specifies (Wirajuda, 2007).

Where the sources diverge, the divergence is minor and itself instructive. The interview lists the third of the Three Orders as security, whereas the annual statements render it as orderly administration. This slippage is consistent with retrospective compression rather than fabrication, and it is the kind of detail a purely interview-based account could not have detected. The value of the contemporaneous record is thus twofold. It independently corroborates the substance, sequence, timing, and vocabulary of the reform as Wirajuda recalled it in 2025, and it disciplines that recollection at the points where memory has smoothed the detail. On this basis, the interview can be used as reliable evidence of the reform's design rather than as an unverified recollection.

Forging New Diplomacy: How the Overhaul Reshaped Foreign Policy Making

The overhaul altered the institutional conditions of foreign policy-making across several domains. The most consequential was the expansion of Indonesia's bilateral diplomatic horizon: ideological stratification gave way to diversified engagement with partners previously rendered inaccessible. Economic diplomacy was integrated into the Ministry's core mission through programs such as the Diplomatic Tour (2006) and Updates from the Region (2007), linking bilateral diplomacy with subnational development priorities. The decentralization laws of 1999, however, also generated paradiplomacy challenges, as regional governments pursued international contacts without adequate coordination with the Ministry. Reskiyah and Pusvitasary (2026) show that these structural constraints persist even in well-established subnational partnerships. Their study of the South Sulawesi–Ehime sister province cooperation found that bureaucratic hurdles, financial asymmetries, and political instability continued to stifle the translation of paradiplomacy frameworks into

tangible outcomes, underscoring the enduring tension between regional autonomy and central diplomatic coordination that the Ministry's total diplomacy approach was designed to manage but has not fully resolved.

The post-reform process required new inter-institutional coordination capacities. Defense procurement from Russia illustrates this complexity: negotiations involved the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, TNI, the Ministry of Trade, and the DPR's *Komisi I*. The failure of the Mi-2 helicopter procurement in 2002, when the intermediary company absconded with the advance payment, underscored the risks of procurement outside reformed institutional channels.

The development of public diplomacy and people-to-people diplomacy represented a further conceptual expansion. The theoretical foundations for this shift were articulated by scholars such as Melissen (2005), who distinguished new public diplomacy from propaganda through its emphasis on two-way dialogue and long-term trust-building. Within the Indonesian context, the Ministry's adoption of public diplomacy reflected both international trends and domestic pressures: the democratic system demanded transparency and public justification of foreign policy, while the emergence of diaspora communities, civil society organizations, and media as active participants in international relations created constituencies that the Ministry could not ignore. De Archellie (2022) and de Archellie and Arumsari (2025) have examined how soft power instruments and public diplomacy approaches operate within the Indonesia–Russia relationship specifically, finding that cultural exchange, educational cooperation, and people-to-people contacts constituted an increasingly important dimension of bilateral engagement.

The reformed Ministry's expanded bilateral capacity was also demonstrated in Indonesia's ability to conduct rapid crisis diplomacy, as exemplified by the marathon diplomacy approach to the Rakhine State crisis in 2017, during which Indonesian delegates conducted direct visits to Myanmar and Bangladesh in quick succession

(Simanjuntak, 2023), a mode of proactive bilateral engagement that would have been institutionally difficult under the Ministry's pre-reform configuration. In the case of Russia, Indonesia had to manage the simultaneous pursuit of closer relations with Moscow and the restoration of defense ties with Washington, which had been disrupted by the arms embargo imposed after the East Timor crisis of 1999. This balancing act required institutional capacities that had not existed under the New Order: the ability to maintain multiple high-level diplomatic dialogues simultaneously, to coordinate messaging across different bilateral tracks, and to manage domestic political pressures from actors with divergent preferences regarding Indonesia's strategic orientation. The fact that Indonesia was able to purchase Sukhoi fighters from Russia while simultaneously negotiating the restoration of military cooperation with the United States testified to the institutional sophistication of the reformed diplomatic apparatus, even if the balancing was not always smooth or free of contradictions.

Empirical Illustration: The Revitalization of Indonesia–Russia Relations

The revitalization of Indonesia–Russia relations after 1998 provides a particularly revealing empirical illustration of how bureaucratic reform concretely affected bilateral diplomacy. The relationship had been effectively frozen throughout the New Order period, not because of any objective incompatibility of interests, but because the institutional configuration of the Indonesian state rendered engagement with Russia ideologically impermissible and bureaucratically impossible. The post-1998 reforms removed both constraints, and the subsequent reopening of the relationship can be traced directly to the new institutional capacities created by the overhaul.

The historical trajectory is instructive. During the Sukarno era, Indonesia and the Soviet Union had maintained extensive relations encompassing military assistance

(submarines, MiG fighter aircraft, and the warship Irian), infrastructure development (Gelora Bung Karno stadium and Hotel Indonesia), and diplomatic cooperation on anti-colonial issues including the West Irian dispute. These relations collapsed after the events of 30 September 1965. Throughout the New Order period, the relationship was maintained at the barest formal level. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, with Indonesia recognizing the Russian Federation on 28 December 1991, removed one structural obstacle by eliminating the communist ideological dimension, but it did not by itself transform the Indonesian institutional configuration that had perpetuated the estrangement. The correspondence between President Yeltsin and President Suharto in 1996, in which Yeltsin sought Indonesian support for Russia's participation in ASEAN and APEC forums (letter of 18 July 1996), and Suharto responded with congratulations on Russia's attainment of ASEAN dialogue partner status (letter of 30 October 1996), indicated mutual interest but produced no institutional breakthrough. Initial attempts at military-technical cooperation were disrupted by the Asian financial crisis that engulfed both countries from 1997 to 1998.

It was only after the institutional reforms of the post-1998 period that the bilateral relationship began to develop substantive content. The sequence of events illustrates the causal mechanism: the end of ideological constraints made engagement conceivable; the restructuring of the Ministry's mission toward balanced bilateral diplomacy made it an institutional priority; the recruitment of language specialists made it operationally feasible; and the diversification of the Ministry's partner base, combined with the pressure of the American arms embargo following the East Timor crisis of 1999, made it strategically imperative. As Wirajuda observed, 'Before reform, it was as if we could not even buy technology from Russia. We were afraid of being boycotted by Western countries. But what happened after reform? The first technology we brought in was Sukhoi. That is weapons technology. Russia, which had been a

specter throughout 32 years of the Suharto era, and suddenly in the reform era we buy weapons from them. That was previously unthinkable' (Wirajuda, 2025).

The visit of Foreign Minister Wirajuda to Moscow in September 2002 was a pivotal moment. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov noted publicly that it was the first visit by an Indonesian Foreign Minister in thirteen years, signaling the significance both sides attached to the resumption of high-level diplomatic contact. The visit established the framework for expanded cooperation and laid the groundwork for President Megawati's state visit in 2003. The institutional mechanisms established during this period, particularly the Joint Commission on Trade, Economic, and Technical Cooperation (established by Presidential Decree No. 113 of 1999 but only operationalized after the Ministry's reform), provided the bureaucratic infrastructure for sustained engagement.

The purchase of Sukhoi Su-27 and Su-30 fighter aircraft, financed through a barter mechanism using commodities including crude palm oil, was both symbolically and substantively significant. Symbolically, it demonstrated that the ideological barriers preventing defense cooperation with Russia for over three decades had been definitively dismantled. Substantively, it represented the kind of complex, multi-ministerial diplomatic undertaking that the reformed Ministry was now equipped to manage: the transaction required coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Indonesian Armed Forces, the Ministry of Trade, and the DPR's *Komisi I*. Former Ambassador Hamid Awaluddin confirmed the centrality of the Sukhoi purchase: 'The purchase of Sukhoi on a massive scale was a sign that the ice that was frozen had melted at the beginning of reform. It melted completely' (Awaluddin, 2024).

Beyond defense procurement, the reformed Ministry also facilitated a dimension of bilateral engagement that would have been inconceivable under the old institutional configuration: the reconciliation with Indonesian diaspora communities

in Russia. Awaluddin's initiative to repatriate Sukarno, an Indonesian national who had been sent to study in the Soviet Union in the 1960s and had been unable to return for 49 years, illustrated the human dimension of institutional transformation. The issuance of travel documents, the coordination with Indonesian media, and the public ceremony at the Ministry's commemoration of 60 years of Indonesia–Russia relations in 2010 were all actions that required institutional capacities, specifically the citizen-service orientation and the public diplomacy infrastructure, that had been created through the overhaul. The case was explicitly conceived as a pilot project for reconciliation: after his publicized return, other members of the Indonesian diaspora in Russia and Eastern Europe followed, their return made possible not by any change in their personal circumstances but by the institutional transformation of the state that had originally exiled them.

Analysis: Agency and Structure in the Reform Process

The reconstruction permits five analytical observations that engage directly with the agency-structure problem set out earlier. *First*, the reformist agents were themselves products of the structure they transformed. Wirajuda's reformist vision was formed within the old institution, partly in reaction against its constraints. Only an account attending to both dimensions simultaneously fits the evidence: an agent-only account would capture Wirajuda's agency but not explain why it took this specific institutional form, while a structure-only account would explain why reform occurred but not why it assumed this particular configuration rather than another.

Second, the post-authoritarian transition simultaneously enabled and constrained reformist agency. The BKN's rejection of personnel promotions illustrates this with particular clarity, since the same regulatory framework both enabled and obstructed reform. Read through the bureaucratic-politics lens of FPA, the promotion dispute is neither free agency nor structural determinism but bargaining between a

reforming minister and an entrenched personnel authority, each acting from the position it occupied within the state apparatus.

Third, the institutional changes produced by the overhaul became structural conditions for subsequent action. The concentric circles framework and meritocratic personnel policies became embedded in institutional routines, shaping possibilities for subsequent generations. The fact that Retno Marsudi later established the Hassan Wirajuda Award for citizen protection illustrates how one generation's innovations became the next generation's structural features. The bilateral relationship with Russia similarly developed its own institutional momentum through the Joint Commission mechanism.

Fourth, the overhaul contained limitations and unresolved contradictions. The failed Kilo-class submarine negotiations, reportedly abandoned due to third-party lobbying (Awaluddin, 2024), revealed the vulnerability of the reformed system's openness to external influence channeled through its newly accessible institutional architecture.

Fifth, the reliability of this reconstruction rests on the convergence of independent sources. The retrospective interviews with Wirajuda and Awaluddin, the contemporaneous internal speeches delivered while the reform was under way, and the documentary record of treaties and decrees corroborate one another on the substance, sequence, and timing of the overhaul. This triangulation is what allows the analysis to move beyond a single actor's recollection to a process-traced account in which agency and structure can be shown, step by step, to have shaped one another, which is the methodological pay-off of an approach that treats documentary and testimonial evidence as mutually validating rather than relying on either alone.

The overhaul was thus not a singular event but an extended process of institutional transformation, producing new configurations that both embodied the achievements of reform and contained the unresolved tensions of the transition. The

foreign policy apparatus that emerged was a specific configuration shaped by the particular character of Indonesia's democratization and by the particular actions of the individuals who navigated it.

CONCLUSION

This article set out to explain how the overhaul of Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs constituted a structuring process that reshaped the institutional architecture of Indonesian diplomacy after 1998. The central argument has been that the overhaul carried out under Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda (2001–2009) was neither an automatic product of democratization nor the achievement of reformist will alone, but the historically specific outcome of their interpenetration: reformist agents, themselves formed within the institution they set out to transform, seized the possibilities that post-authoritarian conditions afforded while contending with the contradictions those conditions carried.

From this account, three substantive findings follow. *First*, the reform reasserted professional civilian control over the formulation of foreign policy, displacing the military's grip that had characterized diplomacy under the New Order and re-establishing the Ministry as the primary institution of Indonesian statecraft. *Second*, the reform generated new institutional capacity—organizational infrastructure, professional cadres, and diplomatic procedure—that expanded the state's ability to conduct and, crucially, to diversify its bilateral relations. *Third*, this newly built capacity enabled the concrete revitalization of Indonesia–Russia relations: a partnership that had been strategically desirable since at least the mid-1990s but that the previous regime's institutional configuration had structurally foreclosed. Taken together, these findings support the article's core claim—that what changed after the overhaul was not Indonesia's strategic environment but the capacity of the Indonesian state to act upon possibilities already available to it.

The article makes a secondary, methodological contribution as well. By reconstructing the Ministry's overhaul through archival methods that are recognizably historical and a causal-analytical framework that is recognizably theoretical—neither subordinated to the other—it shows that the study of foreign policy can bridge the longstanding divide between history and IR, treating the two as genuinely co-constitutive rather than merely juxtaposed.

These findings open several avenues for further work. The institutional history of foreign-policy bureaucracies in transitional states remains underexplored, and the Indonesian case suggests that this bureaucratic dimension may be the most consequential variable mediating between democratization and foreign-policy outcomes, since it determines the infrastructure through which every other factor must pass before issuing in diplomatic action. Comparable institutional analyses could be extended to other post-authoritarian reforms—of defense ministries, trade agencies, and intelligence services—and to Indonesia's other bilateral relationships, with China, India, and Middle Eastern partners among them, on the premise established here: that strategic interests do not translate automatically into diplomatic outcomes, but must be enabled by domestic institutional configurations.

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