



From Civilizational Aspiration to Foreign Policy Deliverability: Indonesia's "Game Changer" Narrative

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ABSTRACT

This article reframes Indonesia's "game changer" thesis as programmatic strategic imagination rather than a forecast of national rise. Drawing on Anis Matta's *Gelombang Ketiga Indonesia* (2014) and *Indonesia sebagai Game Changer* (2024), it reconstructs five role claims: model-maker, bridge-builder, agenda-setter, humanitarian-moral leader, and system-builder. These roles generate implied policy demands that are filtered through a policy capacity diagnostic across analytical, operational, and political dimensions at individual, organizational, and systemic levels. Using Indonesia-focused illustrations, the article shows that deliverability depends on capacity signatures, especially organizational-operational coordination and systemic-political legitimation, rather than narrative ambition alone. It contributes a conversion mechanism for explaining how civilizational aspiration becomes capacity-filtered foreign policy practice, including selective enactment, quiet diplomacy, narrative-dominant adaptation, role conflict, and overstretch risk.

Keyword: Indonesia; strategic imagination; role theory; policy capacity; foreign policy deliverability

Introduction

Indonesia's foreign policy has rarely lacked ambition. What varies, sometimes sharply, is whether ambitious narratives become deliverable statecraft: policy that is resourced, coordinated, and resilient enough to survive domestic contestation and international turbulence. This aspiration-execution gap should not be treated simply as a moral failing, a leadership-personality story, or a mismatch between rhetoric and reality. It is better understood as an analytically tractable problem at the intersection of strategic imagination, role enactment, and policy capacity. Framed this way, the article speaks to a broader

question in Indonesian foreign policy analysis: how claims about international role and national purpose are translated into sustainable policy performance.

Existing scholarship has already examined Indonesia's aspiration-constraint problem from several directions. Sukma's study of Islam in Indonesian foreign policy shows that the Islamic factor has generally entered foreign policy in form rather than substance, because Indonesia's external conduct has been constrained by the dilemma of dual state identity and domestic weakness (Sukma, 2004). Anwar similarly observes that Indonesia's post-authoritarian identity as the world's largest Muslim-majority country and one of the world's largest democracies has generated bridge-building and model-making expectations, especially in relation to Islam, democracy, and modernity. Yet she also notes that religious intolerance, limited recognition in the wider Islamic world, and domestic political difficulties have complicated Indonesia's aspiration to become a bridge between the Islamic world and the West or an alternative model for Muslim societies (Anwar, 2018). These works are important because they show that Indonesia's foreign policy ambition has always been mediated by domestic political foundations, identity management, and the credibility of its own governance.

A second body of scholarship explains Indonesia's international ambition through status, role, and middle-power behaviour. Karim (2018) argues that middle power should be understood not only as a material category, but also as an international status pursued through the enactment of role conceptions. In Indonesia's case, these role conceptions include regional leader, voice for developing countries, advocate of democracy, and bridge-builder. Karim (2021) further develops the concept of role legitimation to explain how policymakers justify expansive foreign policy roles to domestic audiences, particularly when such roles may invite contestation. Rosyidin (2017) adds another layer by arguing that Indonesia's foreign policy under Jokowi became more domestically oriented despite the wider opportunity structure created by the Asian Century. More recently, Rosyidin and Kusumawardhana (2025) show that Indonesia's major-power aspiration can also be read through status signaling, where costly actions such as military modernization project an image of Indonesia as more than a conventional middle power.

These approaches provide essential building blocks, but they leave a narrower problem underdeveloped. Role theory explains how roles are conceived, enacted, contested, and legitimated, but it does not by itself specify what those roles require administratively and institutionally. Intermestic approaches show how domestic and international arenas interact, but they tend to explain constraint rather than translate ambition into operational task demands. Policy capacity scholarship identifies the competences and capabilities that make policy work, but it has rarely been used to unpack how civilizational foreign policy narratives become deliverable or non-deliverable statecraft. The missing link is therefore not whether Indonesia aspires to a larger international role. The more precise problem is how a high-scale narrative is converted into policy demands and filtered through analytical, operational, and political capacities.

The problem becomes especially visible when Indonesia is narrated not merely as a nation-state pursuing interests, but as a civilizational project pursuing status, recognition, and model-making. In Anis Matta's political thought, Indonesia is framed as a polity "*dilahirkan oleh pilihan dan cita-cita*," a founding story that legitimates role claims beyond

conventional regional leadership (Matta, 2014, p. 10). A decade later, the “game changer” thesis intensifies this register. Matta argues that Indonesia “*mempunyai DNA untuk menjadi model*” and that the current global moment constitutes “*momentum Indonesia untuk menjadi kekuatan superpower baru*” (Matta, 2024, p. 20). These claims matter analytically because they articulate a distinctive horizon of Indonesian foreign policy ambition: not only influence, but exemplary status.

For a policy-oriented inquiry, Matta is especially useful because the argument is not confined to identity claims or rhetorical aspiration. It also contains a critique of institutional translation. In one blunt formulation, Islamic politics often fails, Matta argues, because “*dia tidak bisa mentransformasi kesadaran agama menjadi pemikiran yang sistemik yang bisa diterapkan dalam kehidupan bernegara*” (Matta, 2024, p. 5). Read analytically, the claim identifies an institutional conversion problem: moral or civilizational consciousness does not automatically yield governing designs that can be implemented, coordinated, and defended under contestation. In that sense, the “game changer” narrative already implies a capacity question, not merely an identity claim.

This article therefore approaches the “game changer” narrative neither as a forecast nor as mere branding. It is treated as discursive empirical material: an articulated strategic imagination that specifies what Indonesia should be and do. It also treats the narrative as a bundle of role propositions that can be assessed against what Indonesia’s foreign policy machinery is capable of delivering. This perspective is particularly relevant in the Indonesian case, where external positioning often operates in an intermestic register. Existing scholarship shows that Indonesia’s foreign policy narratives are shaped through the interaction of domestic political contestation, identity-based legitimation, and international signaling. Domestic actors may alter the government’s risk calculus on high-salience issues; public diplomacy depends on the management of domestic and foreign audiences; and narratives of moderate Islam, democracy, and modernity are politically constructed within both domestic and global discursive fields (Gindarsah, 2012; Huijgh, 2017; Tan, 2022; Umar, 2016). These dynamics can amplify role expectations while also constraining the consistency, credibility, and institutional delivery of foreign policy commitments.

Role theory and middle-power scholarship provide a useful starting point because they show that international status is pursued not only through material capability, but also through role conceptions, recognition, and enactment (Karim, 2018; Nolte & Schenoni, 2024; Vandamme, 2019). In Indonesia’s case, such scholarship clarifies recurring role claims such as regional leader, bridge-builder, advocate of democracy, voice of developing countries, and model Muslim democracy (Karim, 2018, 2021). Yet these approaches do not fully explain what role claims require once they are translated into operational commitments. Roles are not self-executing. They generate demands for coalition-building, diplomatic infrastructure, whole-of-government coordination, domestic legitimation, and sustained policy follow-through. This is where the article’s deliverability framework adds explanatory value: it shifts the analysis from role conception and legitimation to the capacity-mediated conversion of role claims into credible foreign policy practice.

Capacity provides the vocabulary needed to diagnose this stress test without collapsing the analysis into personality narratives or structural determinism. Wu, Ramesh,

and Howlett conceptualize policy capacity as competences and capabilities across analytical, operational, and political dimensions at individual, organizational, and systemic levels (Wu et al., 2015). Foreign policy capacity scholarship similarly emphasizes execution under volatility: the ability to respond flexibly and rapidly while maintaining dependable judgment and institutional steadiness (Gyngell & Wesley, 2007). Complementing this, diplomatic-capacity research provides practical anchors, including budgets, legal competences, the size and distribution of foreign services, and professionalization, which shape what states can do consistently abroad (Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019). In this article, capacity is not used as a residual explanation for failure, but as a diagnostic filter for identifying where role claims become institutionally demanding.

This framework also clarifies where civilizational ambition can bend, adapt, or break. If policy demands outstrip mobilizable capacity, one likely outcome is quiet diplomacy: lower-cost instruments that preserve narrative coherence while limiting exposure. Another is role conflict, in which domestic and international expectations pull policy in different directions (Smith & Williams, 2021). A further risk is overstretched, where ambitions expand beyond underlying capabilities and are sustained by coalitions and legitimating narratives until costs accumulate and credibility erodes. This mechanism has been highlighted in middle-power overstretch debates, although the present article uses it cautiously as a generic risk condition rather than a direct analogy to great-power overreach (Schenoni et al., 2022).

The article develops a capacity-mediated deliverability framework that traces how strategic imagination becomes role claims, how role claims generate policy demands, and how those demands are filtered through policy capacity. Its contribution is threefold. Conceptually, it clarifies the conversion mechanism between civilizational aspiration and foreign policy deliverability, thereby extending role-theoretic accounts of Indonesian foreign policy beyond role conception, status-seeking, and legitimation. Empirically, it treats Matta's *Gelombang Ketiga Indonesia* and *Indonesia sebagai Game Changer* as a coherent narrative corpus that articulates Indonesia's "game changer" imagination and reconstructs the role repertoire embedded in that narrative. Analytically, it introduces policy capacity as a diagnostic bridge for identifying why ambitious foreign policy narratives may produce sustained enactment, selective enactment, quiet diplomacy, role conflict, or overstretch risk.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section develops the analytical framework linking strategic imagination, role claims, policy demands, and capacity filters. The research design section explains the narrative reconstruction and capacity-diagnostic procedure. The results and discussion section reconstructs the "game changer" narrative, maps its implied role repertoire, diagnoses capacity signatures, and illustrates the framework through Indonesia-focused cases. The conclusion reflects on what this framework contributes to the study of Indonesia's global role and, more broadly, to foreign policy analysis of Muslim-majority democracies.

Theoretical Framework

This article develops a capacity-mediated framework for analysing how ambitious foreign policy narratives are translated into policy performance. The framework is designed for an Indonesia-focused foreign policy analysis inquiry, but it is also intended to be portable to

other Muslim-majority democracies that combine high civilizational ambition with institutional and political constraints. Its core proposition is that strategic imagination does not become foreign policy influence automatically. It must first be articulated as role claims, translated into policy demands, and then filtered through the capacities of the foreign policy system. The framework therefore links five analytical elements: strategic imagination, role claims, policy demands, policy capacity requirements, and deliverability outcomes.

Strategic Imagination as an Input to Role Formation

The starting point is strategic imagination, understood here as an articulated narrative about what a state is, what role it should play, and what historical or civilizational horizon should guide its external conduct. In this article, Anis Matta's *Gelombang Ketiga Indonesia* and *Indonesia sebagai Game Changer* are treated as a discursive corpus that formulates such a horizon (Matta, 2014, 2024). The analytical value of this corpus lies not in whether it predicts future outcomes accurately, but in the fact that it specifies claims about Indonesia's place in regional and global politics. It therefore provides a traceable source of role imagination before formal policy adoption.

This move is important because foreign policy debates in Indonesia are often read through either material capability arguments or leadership narratives. A strategic imagination lens allows the analysis to identify a prior ideational layer: the architecture of aspiration that frames what kinds of international role are considered legitimate, desirable, and historically meaningful. Matta's arguments are particularly useful because he combines civilizational aspiration, political identity, and institutional critique. The narrative does not stop at symbolic status claims; it also implies that political projects fail when they cannot be translated into systemic and governable arrangements (Matta, 2024). Read analytically, this implies that role ambition is inseparable from institutional conversion.

The framework therefore treats strategic imagination as an input condition for role formation. It structures the repertoire of roles considered plausible or desirable, and it shapes the political language used to justify foreign policy activism. In Indonesia case, this is especially relevant because external positioning has often been articulated through intermestic narratives linking Islam, democracy, modernity, and international engagement (Huijgh, 2017; Umar, 2016).

Role Claims as the Bridge from Aspiration to Practice

The second component of the framework is role theory, supplemented by middle-power scholarship. Role theory is useful because it shifts attention from static labels such as "middle power" to the processes through which states define, enact, and legitimate international roles. In this perspective, status-seeking is not simply a function of material capabilities. It is pursued through role conceptions and performances that seek recognition from domestic and international audiences (Karim, 2018; Thies & Sari, 2018).

For Indonesia, this lens helps parse recurring role claims such as regional leader, bridge-builder, mediator, norm entrepreneur, humanitarian actor, or model Muslim democracy. Karim (2018) shows that Indonesia's middle-power status is pursued through role conceptions such as voice for developing countries, regional leader, advocate of democracy, and bridge-builder. Karim (2021) further demonstrates that such roles must be

legitimate domestically, especially where expansive foreign policy may invite contestation. This matters directly for the present article because the “game changer” narrative is not merely a status aspiration. It is a generator of role claims that require recognition, legitimation, and enactment.

Recent middle-power scholarship also strengthens this argument by distinguishing between role aspiration, leadership claims, and actual influence. Giacomello and Verbeek (2024) underscore the diversity of middle-power as a homogeneous category and argue that middle-power behaviour must be understood through both systemic opportunities and domestic preference formation. Nolte and Schenoni (2024) similarly show that regional power status does not automatically produce regional leadership. It may be pursued as a goal and enacted as a role, but it is not guaranteed by self-ascription alone. These insights prevent the article from reading ambitious narrative claims as evidence of achieved influence. Instead, they support a more disciplined question: what policy demands follow from specific role claims, and under what conditions can these demands be met?

Accordingly, the framework distinguishes among three analytically separate but connected terms. Status aspiration refers to the desired standing or recognition. Role claim refers to the articulated function a state seeks to perform. Role enactment refers to the policy practices through which the role is performed and judged. Policy demand refers to the practical requirements generated by a role claim, such as coalition-building, diplomatic infrastructure, crisis responsiveness, coordination, and domestic legitimation. This fourth term is crucial because it identifies the conversion point between discourse and delivery.

Policy Capacity as the Deliverability Filter

The third component of the framework introduces policy capacity as the mechanism that mediates between role claims and policy outcomes. The article uses policy capacity not as a generic administrative concept, but as a structured diagnostic for foreign policy deliverability. Wu, Ramesh, and Howlett (2015) conceptualize policy capacity as competences and capabilities distributed across analytical, operational, and political dimensions, and across individual, organizational, and systemic levels. This 3×3 matrix is especially useful for the present argument because it allows the analysis to move beyond binary judgments such as “ambitious” versus “realistic” or “rhetoric” versus “reality.” Instead, it specifies where and how conversion failures may occur.

In this framework, role claims generate policy demands. Agenda-setting requires analytical capacity for prioritization and strategic coherence. Coalition-building and convening require diplomatic networks and political brokerage. Humanitarian or moral leadership requires crisis responsiveness, reputational management, and domestic legitimation. System-building requires whole-of-government coordination, bureaucratic routines, and institutional follow-through. Whether these demands can be delivered depends on capacity configurations. A state may possess strong individual-level diplomatic skills but weak organizational coordination; or strong symbolic political capacity domestically but limited systemic-operational capacity for sustained international engagement. Such configurations can produce uneven patterns of foreign policy performance that are often misread as inconsistency or indecision.

Foreign policy capacity scholarship reinforces this institutional reading. Gyngell and Wesley (2007) emphasize that foreign policy effectiveness depends not only on strategic vision but also on bureaucratic machinery capable of responding under conditions of uncertainty while maintaining judgment, continuity, and institutional steadiness. This insight is central to the article's concept of deliverability. Deliverability is not defined as policy success in a maximal sense. Rather, it refers to the extent to which foreign policy commitments can be implemented credibly, coordinated across institutions, and sustained under political and international stress.

Schiavon and Figueroa (2019) add a further advantage by identifying more concrete indicators of foreign policy capacity, including foreign minister budgets, legal competences, size and distribution of foreign services, and professionalization. Their contribution helps ground the framework in observable institutional features and prevents "capacity" from becoming an abstract residual explanation. In the Indonesian case, this is particularly important because debates about foreign policy ambition often rely on narrative and political symbolism, while the institutional conditions of consistent delivery receive less systematic attention.

Deliverability Outcomes and Failure Modes

The final component of the framework specifies the outcomes that can emerge when role claims encounter capacity constraints. The framework does not assume a single outcome such as success or failure. Instead, it proposes a set of deliverability outcomes that vary according to the alignment or misalignment between policy demands and capacity configurations.

When role claims are broadly matched by mobilizable capacities, the likely outcome is credible role enactment: foreign policy activism that is sustained, coordinated, and recognized as more than episodic performance. When capacity is thinner, especially in organizational-operational or systemic-political dimensions, states may rely on quiet diplomacy or lower-cost instruments that preserve room for maneuver while limiting exposure. In the Indonesian context, this possibility is illustrated by work showing how Indonesia's quiet diplomacy in the Rohingya crisis reflected domestic political pressures, Islamic humanitarian framing, civil-military considerations, and ASEAN constraints (Smith & Williams, 2021). Quiet diplomacy is therefore not treated here as mere passivity, but as a possible capacity-congruent adaptation.

A second outcome is role conflict, where domestic and international expectations pull policy in different directions. This is especially relevant in democratic settings where role enactment must be legitimized internally as well as externally (Karim, 2021). Gindarsah's (2012) study of Indonesia's position on Iran-related sanctions illustrates how domestic political contestation can shape foreign policy consistency and international credibility. The framework treats such dynamics not as anomalies but as expected consequences when the political capacity required for dual-audience legitimation is strained.

A third outcome is narrative-dominant adaptation, where discursive projection and symbolic positioning become more prominent than operational follow-through. This outcome draws on scholarship showing that Indonesia's public diplomacy has relied on an intermestic niche narrative linking Islam, democracy, moderation, and modernity, while

also depending on the credibility of domestic foundations and institutional integration (Anwar, 2018; Huijgh, 2017; Karim, 2021; Tan, 2022; Umar, 2016). This does not mean that narrative instruments are merely cosmetic. Public diplomacy and strategic communication can generate recognition, legitimacy, and convening power. The risk arises when narrative capacity becomes weakly connected to organizational-operational capacity, producing reputational claims that are difficult for the state to sustain through institutional delivery.

A fourth outcome is overstretching risk, defined here in a qualified sense. The article does not transpose great-power overstretch arguments mechanically to Indonesia. Florig (2010) warns against conceptually loose use of overreach and overstretch, and this caution is important. At the same time, overstretch scholarship is useful for identifying a generic mechanism through which status aspirations and legitimating narratives can expand foreign policy commitments beyond sustainable capacity. Pu and Wang (2018) show debates on China's rise have involved concerns about strategic overstretch, while Shenoni et al. (2022) develop the concept more directly for middle powers by defining foreign policy overstretch as the expansion of goals and ambitions beyond capabilities. Their argument is especially relevant here because it links permissive international environments, domestic coalitions, and foreign policy myths to the swelling of external commitments. In this article, overstretch is therefore treated not as an empirical verdict on Indonesia, but as a risk condition that becomes more plausible when expectation inflation, role expansion, and narrative legitimation outpace institutionalization.

Table 1. Literature-to-Framework Map: What Each Strand Contributes

Literature strand	Core concept(s) borrowed	What it explains in this article	Key references (indicative)
Role theory & role legitimation	Role conception; role performance; recognition; domestic legitimation	How strategic imagination becomes role claims and why roles become contested	Karim (2018, 2021); Thies and Sari (2018)
Middle power practice	Niche diplomacy; coalition entrepreneurship; status through practice	How "middle power" work is performed, not assumed	Vandamme (2019); Giacomello and Verbeek (2024); Nolte and Schenoni (2024)
Foreign policy capacity	Statecraft machinery; responsiveness; consistency	Why bureaucratic systems condition deliverability beyond rhetoric	Gyngell and Wesley (2007); Robertson and East (2005)
Public policy capacity	Analytical/operational/ political × levels	A structured diagnostic for where deliverability breaks	Wu, Ramesh, and Howlett (2015)
Diplomatic capacity measurement	Budget/legal competences/ footprint/professionalization	How expanded ambition should leave institutional traces	Schiavon and Figueroa (2019)
Ambition–capability mismatch / overstretch	Commitment inflation; myth maintenance; overreach logic	Failure modes when demands outpace capacity	Schenoni et al. (2022)
Indonesia foreign policy scholarship	Intermestic diplomacy; sectoral coordination; identity-linked	Empirical illustrations of	Gindarsah (2012); Febrica (2017); Huijgh

(illustrative)	contestation	constraints and adaptations	(2017); Sukma (2011); Smith and Williams (2021); Umar (2016); Tan (2022); Acharya (2014)
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Method

This study employs a qualitative, framework-building research design that combines narrative reconstruction with a capacity-based diagnostic. The purpose is not to produce an exhaustive evaluation of Indonesia's foreign policy performance across issue areas, but to develop an analytically portable framework for assessing when ambitious strategic narratives can be translated into deliverable statecraft. In this design, "deliverability" is treated as a patterned institutional conversion problem: claims about global agency and role ambition are analytically useful insofar as they generate identifiable policy demands that must be carried by the state's policy and diplomatic machinery (Gyngell & Wesley, 2007; Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019; Wu et al., 2015).

The primary empirical corpus consists of two books by Anis Matta, *Gelombang Ketiga Indonesia* (Matta, 2014) and *Indonesia sebagai Game Changer* (Matta, 2024). These texts are treated as discursive materials that articulate a civilizational strategic imagination and embed implicit propositions about Indonesia's international role, scope of action, and required forms of institutional conversion. The choice of corpus is purposive rather than representative. The objective is to analyze a coherent and politically salient narrative stream, not to map the full universe of Indonesian foreign policy discourse. A related scholarly analysis of Matta's strategic narratives is used as a secondary interpretive anchor to sharpen narrative coding and role interpretation, particularly in identifying how narrative elements structure role claims before formal policy adoption (Endiartia, 2025). The present article differs from that earlier work by shifting the analytical focus from narrative-led role formation to capacity-mediated foreign policy deliverability.

The case logic is analytical and illustrative. Matta's texts are relevant because they combine civilizational aspiration, foreign policy role claims, and explicit concern with institutional translation. This makes the corpus suitable for a framework that seeks to connect strategic imagination to policy deliverability. The design does not assume that Matta's narratives are state doctrine, nor does it infer policy outcomes directly from discursive ambition. Instead, the corpus is used to reconstruct a role repertoire and to derive the practical policy demands implied by those role claims. This approach is consistent with a pre-policy analytical lens in foreign policy analysis, where discursive production is examined as a site of role articulation and contestation rather than as a proxy for implementation.

Secondary materials are used in two distinct ways. First, concept-forming sources in role theory, middle power scholarship, and policy capacity research inform the analytical framework and coding logic (e.g., Karim, 2021; Wu et al., 2015). Second, Indonesia-focused scholarship is used as focused analytic illustration of recurrent mechanisms affecting deliverability, such as domestic contestation, role legitimation pressures, intermestic diplomatic demands, quiet diplomacy, and capacity-congruent adaptation (Gindarsah,

2012; Huijgh, 2017; Smith & Williams, 2021; Umar, 2016). These works are not treated as a comprehensive literature review of Indonesian foreign policy, nor as evidence of Matta's influence on policy. Their function is diagnostic: to illuminate plausible pathways through which capacity constraints shape the enactment, adaptation, or attenuation of ambitious role claims.

The analytical procedure proceeds in four steps. First, the Matta corpus is read closely to identify core narrative claims and reconstruct the implied role repertoire of the "game changer" thesis. Text segments are coded for explicit and implicit role claims (for example, model-making, bridge-building, agenda-setting, moral leadership, and system-shaping), for statements indicating scope and ambition, and for passages that signal institutional conversion concerns. Coding emphasizes interpretive consistency and conceptual parsimony rather than exhaustive textual quantification. Where direct quotation is used in the empirical sections, page numbers are provided and translations are rendered into English with attention to semantic fidelity.

Second, the reconstructed role repertoire is translated into implied policy demands. This step shifts the analysis from narrative content to action requirements. Coding is oriented toward practical tasks associated with role enactment, including agenda-setting and prioritization, coalition-building and convening, diplomatic footprint and institutional infrastructure, inter-agency coordination, domestic legitimation and narrative governance, and crisis responsiveness. The translation rule is deliberately conservative: where a role claim does not clearly imply a practical demand, no demand is imputed.

Third, the implied policy demands are mapped onto a structured capacity diagnostic derived from the policy capacity literature, especially the analytical-operational-political by individual-organizational-systemic matrix proposed by Wu et al. (2015). The matrix is adapted to foreign policy tasks by incorporating insights on bureaucratic responsiveness and institutional steadiness (Gyngell & Wesley, 2007) and on foreign policy capacities anchored in diplomatic resources and professionalization (Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019). This produces "capacity signatures," understood as hypotheses regarding which capacity components are most likely to bind when specific role claims are pursued. To maintain tractability, the outputs are limited to a small set of analytical devices: a role-to-demand table, a capacity mapping table, a role-demand-capacity-outcome linkage table, and one conceptual figure.

Fourth, the framework is illustrated through focused vignettes drawn from Indonesia-focused scholarship. Vignettes are selected using three criteria: theoretical leverage, meaning clear exposure of a mechanism; variation, meaning coverage of different demand types, such as legitimation, coordination, or instrument choice; and evidentiary quality, meaning peer-reviewed and analytically explicit scholarship. The purpose is diagnostic rather than exhaustive. The vignettes show how similar narrative aspirations may produce different deliverability outcomes depending on which capacity constraints bind and how domestic contestation interacts with external recognition pressures (Gindarsah, 2012; Huijgh, 2017; Karim, 2021; Smith & Williams, 2021).

This design prioritizes conceptual clarity and transparent inference boundaries. It does not claim that the Matta corpus represents all Indonesian strategic discourse, nor does it provide a new dataset of diplomatic resources or a full audit of Indonesia's foreign policy

apparatus. The framework is presented as portable and testable, while the present article uses published texts and secondary scholarship for illustration. No human subjects are involved, and all materials are publicly available, which removes the need for human-subject ethics clearance while increasing the importance of accurate citation, careful quotation, and disciplined interpretation.

Result and Discussion

This section reconstructs the “game changer” thesis as a form of strategic imagination and traces how it generates role claims, policy demands, and deliverability burdens. Rather than treating the narrative as a forecast of national rise, the analysis reads the Matta corpus as a programmatic articulation of what Indonesia should be and what it should do internationally. The argument proceeds in three steps: first, reconstructing the narrative architecture; second, translating role claims into implied policy demands; and third, diagnosing the capacity signatures that condition their enactment.

Reconstructing the “Game Changer” Narrative as Strategic Imagination

The “game changer” thesis is best understood not as a prediction of Indonesia’s national ascent, but as a programmatic strategic imagination that reframes Indonesia as a historically situated civilizational actor. Across *Gelombang Ketiga Indonesia* (2014) and *Indonesia sebagai Game Changer* (2024), Indonesia is portrayed less as a state merely seeking higher rank in competitive hierarchy than as a values-founded polity whose external agency derives from its normative synthesis, historical experience, and institutional transformation. The narrative architecture is therefore upstream: identity, mission, and historical timing precede questions of material capability.

In the earlier text, Indonesia is described as “*bangsa yang dilahirkan oleh pilihan dan cita-cita*” (a nation born of choices and ideals) (Matta, 2014, p. 10). This formulation shifts the basis of national legitimacy from ethnolinguistic homogeneity to normative commitment. Indonesia’s founding compromise, particularly the reconciliation between Islamic and national identities, is presented as an internal bridge that can later be externalized as a wider political source. The movement from “*entitas politik*” to “*entitas peradaban*” (Matta, 2014, p. 84) marks a civilizational reframing of statehood: Indonesia is urged to see itself not merely as an administrative unit within a system of states, but as a bearer of ideas with broader systemic relevance. Such a reframing enlarges the horizon of foreign policy from reactive diplomacy to purposive statecraft.

The 2024 text intensifies this logic by linking Indonesia’s identity to model for reconciling Islam, democracy, and modern governance (Matta, 2024, p. 20). In this formulation, superpower status is not defined primarily by wealth or military supremacy, but by the capacity to generate a compelling model of political and social order (Matta, 2024, pp. 15, 19). This claim therefore shifts the evaluative criterion of power from accumulation to differentiation. Indonesia’s prospective agency is grounded in its distinct synthesis as a Muslim-majority democracy, a plural society, and a developing state seeking to project an alternative grammar of global relevance.

Importantly, the corpus also embeds a critique that reveals an awareness of institutional conditionality. One of the recurring themes in the 2024 text is the inability of

political Islam to transform moral consciousness into “*pemikiran yang sistemik*” (systemic thinking) applicable to governance (Matta, 2024, p. 5). This admission functions as more than internal critique; it identifies the conversion problem at the heart of the narrative. Civilizational ambition requires more than moral confidence or rhetorical projection. It requires the translation of ideals into institutional designs, policy routines, and governing capacities that can produce durable outcomes. conversion.

The scaling of ambition reinforces this conversion problem. Matta’s movement from domestic consolidation to regional leadership, engagement with the Muslim world, and eventual global agenda-setting (Matta, 2024, p. 21) implies sequencing, prioritization, and sustained coordination. The language of “*momentum*” and historical opportunity gives the narrative urgency, but it also magnifies the delivery burden attached to expanded role expectations. The greater the scale of aspiration, the more demanding the requirements for institutional coherence, diplomatic infrastructure, and political legitimation become. Taken together, the two texts construct Indonesia as a civilizational actor endowed with normative resources and historical timing, but whose credible enactment depends on governance transformation. The “game changer” thesis therefore operates as strategic imagination: it generates role expectations while simultaneously exposing the institutional conversion problem that lies ahead. The analytic task is not to verify whether Indonesia has already become a “game changer,” but to identify what role claims the narrative generates and what policy demands those claims impose.

Role Repertoire and Implied Policy Demands

This subsection addresses two linked questions: what the “game changer” narrative implies Indonesia should do, and what the state would have to deliver in order to enact those implied roles. The core claim advanced here is that the thesis is best understood as a repertoire of roles rather than a singular ambition. Each role claim generates distinct policy demands, and it is the accumulation and simultaneity of these demands that transform strategic imagination into a problem of deliverability.

From Narrative Architecture to Role Repertoire

When the narrative architecture reconstructed above is translated into foreign policy terms, it yields a structured set of role claims. These claims do not emerge from external theory imposed upon the texts, but from recurring patterns within the Matta corpus itself. Across the two books, Indonesia is repeatedly imagined as a polity with a distinctive historical mission, a differentiated civilizational identity, and a prospective role beyond conventional status-seeking. In foreign policy terms, this produces a repertoire of five role claims: model-maker, bridge-builder, humanitarian-moral leader, regional-to-global agenda-setter, and civilizational system-builder.

First, Indonesia is framed as a model Muslim-majority democracy. This role rests on the claim that Indonesia’s internal synthesis of Islam, democracy, pluralism, and modern governance can serve as an example beyond its borders (Matta, 2014, 2024). In the 2024 text, the claim that Indonesia possesses the “DNA” to become a model function as a generative script: it presupposes that Indonesia’s domestic governance and external projection must be sufficiently coherent to sustain exemplary status (Matta, 2024, p. 20). In role-theoretic terms, this resembles scholarship on Indonesia’s role conceptions as a middle power and

democracy actor, where domestic identity becomes a resource for international recognition and performance (Karim, 2018, 2021; Thies & Sari, 2018). The role is therefore not merely symbolic. It implies reputation management, norm projection, and the capacity to demonstrate that domestic political experience can be rendered externally meaningful.

Second, the corpus advances a bridge-builder or mediator role. The internal reconciliation between Islam and national identity is implicitly externalized into a broader function of connecting civilizations, ideological blocs, and geopolitical divides. Indonesia is imagined as a connector between Muslim and Western worlds, between great powers and the Global South, and between ideological cleavages that structure global disorder. This resonates with middle-power scholarship that emphasizes brokerage, coalition-building, mediation, and niche diplomacy as characteristic practices of states seeking influence beyond material capability alone (Giacomello & Verbeek, 2024; Nolte & Schenoni, 2024; Thies & Sari, 2018). Yet in the Matta corpus, bridge-building is not simply a pragmatic diplomatic niche. It is embedded within a civilizational vocation.

Third, the narrative implies a humanitarian-moral leadership role, particularly in relation to high-salience humanitarian issues with Muslim solidarity dimensions. The invocation of *Islam as rahmatan lil 'alamin*, or mercy to the worlds, gives Indonesia's projected international role a moral vocabulary that goes beyond interest-based diplomacy (Matta, 2024). This role implies that Indonesia should not only mediate, but also signal moral concern, protect reputation, and engage in crisis diplomacy where humanitarian suffering, religious identity, and international legitimacy intersect. It is therefore a demanding role because moral leadership creates visibility pressures: silence, delay, or ambiguity may be interpreted as inconsistency between proclaimed vocation and actual conduct.

Fourth, the corpus casts Indonesia as a regional-to-global agenda-setter. The scaling movement from domestic consolidation to regional leadership, engagement with the Muslim world, and eventual global agenda-setting signals an ambition to initiate and shape forums rather than merely participate in them (Matta, 2024, p. 21). Agenda-setting here is both procedural and symbolic. Procedurally, it requires convening capacity, coalition entrepreneurship, and institutional follow-through. Symbolically, it requires the ability to articulate frameworks that others recognize as legitimate and useful. This role is especially demanding because agenda-setting success is not achieved by proclamation alone; it requires sustained diplomatic labour, cross-sector coordination, and continuity beyond episodic initiatives.

Fifth, and more subtly, the corpus advances a civilizational system-builder role. The critique that moral consciousness has not been transformed into systemic thinking applicable to governance implies that Indonesia must become capable of institutional translation (Matta, 2024, p. 5). This role differs from model-making or mediation. It demands the construction of governing systems, policy designs, and bureaucratic routines that can convert moral and civilizational claims into workable institutional arrangements. In this sense, system-building is the deepest role claim in the corpus because it directs attention back to the domestic foundations of external credibility.

These claims form a role repertoire rather than a single role. The "game changer" is not one fixed position, but a constellation of expectations linking domestic governance, regional engagement, Muslim-world positioning, and global agenda-setting. This repertoire

is analytically useful because it reveals that the narrative's deliverability problem begins not at the level of aspiration, but at the point where multiple roles generate simultaneous and partly competing policy demands.

Role Tensions and the Problem of Simultaneity

The repertoire structure introduces an analytical complication: simultaneity. Enacting several roles at once produces tensions that cannot be resolved through aspiration alone. Each role claim has its own audience, instruments, credibility conditions, and exposure risks. When compressed into a single foreign policy posture, these roles can reinforce one another, but they can also generate conflicting expectations.

Model-making invites domestic and international scrutiny. A state claiming to exemplify Muslim-majority democracy must sustain a degree of governance credibility that can survive contestation at home and interpretation abroad. This is especially demanding because the model-maker role rests on a tight connection between domestic experience and external projection. If domestic democratic quality, pluralism, or religious moderation becomes contested, the credibility of the external role is affected as well. Grzywacz's analysis of Indonesia's Muslim democracy model is relevant here because it shows that Indonesia's role performance is constrained by conflict between its own role conception and external role prescriptions. Western audiences may expect more active democracy promotion, while Muslim-majority audiences may expect stronger Islamic solidarity or resist democracy-related prescriptions (Grzywacz, 2020).

Humanitarian-moral leadership creates responsiveness burdens. Crises require timely, visible, and principled action, but such action must be coordinated across diplomatic, humanitarian, security, and domestic political channels. Indonesia's response to the Rohingya crisis illustrates this tension: Islamic humanitarianism and domestic pressures created expectations of visible solidarity, while civil-military considerations and ASEAN norms encouraged lower-escalation diplomatic instruments (Smith & Williams, 2021). The more salient the issue for domestic constituencies, the greater the pressure for symbolic affirmation. Yet excessive symbolic positioning can complicate quiet negotiation, while excessive caution can be interpreted as moral inconsistency. The role therefore places particular strain on political capacity and crisis coordination.

Agenda-setting generates sequencing and institutionalization burdens. A state seeking to move from regional leadership to wider global agenda-setting must prioritize among issues, forums, and coalitions. Indonesia-focused scholarship shows that regional leadership has often served as a platform for wider external projection: Acharya (2014) characterizes Indonesia as a regional power with global interests and highlights its roles in norm-setting, consensus-building, and regional architecture-building, while Karim (2018) shows how Indonesia's regional leader role has been extended to support its pursuit of middle-power status at the global level. Agastia's (2020) analysis of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific further illustrates this pattern, showing how Indonesia located its middle-power role in the Indo-Pacific through the enactment of regional leader and bridge-builder roles. These examples suggest that convening dialogues, proposing principles, and initiating frameworks can generate reputational gains. Yet such gains do not automatically solve the delivery problem: sustaining agenda-setting requires bureaucratic follow-through,

budgetary support, expert communities, inter-agency coordination, and continuity across political cycles. Without sequencing discipline, agenda-setting risks fragmentation: many initiatives can be launched, but fewer can be institutionalized.

System-building creates the deepest conversion burden. It requires the translation of civilizational aspiration into institutional designs, policy routines, and whole-of-government coordination. This role is less visible than model-making or mediation, but it is foundational. Policy capacity scholarship is useful here because it distinguishes analytical, operational, and political capacities across individual, organizational, and systemic levels, while foreign policy capacity research highlights the importance of bureaucratic steadiness, diplomatic infrastructure, professionalization, and resource support (Gyngell & Wesley, 2007; Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019; Wu et al., 2015). Without system-building capacity, the other roles risk becoming episodic performances rather than durable statecraft. The problem is therefore not only whether Indonesia can claim a large role, but whether its institutional machinery can absorb, coordinate, and sustain the work generated by that claim.

These tensions illustrate why deliverability cannot be assessed in all-or-nothing terms. Success in one role may coexist with strain in another. Model-making may be sustained through public diplomacy while system-building remains incomplete. Mediation may be effective in low-visibility settings while moral leadership remains domestically contested. Agenda-setting may succeed at the level of framing while implementation lags behind. The analytical challenge is therefore to trace how roles interact, where their demands accumulate, and which capacities become binding as the repertoire is enacted.

Translating Roles into Implied Policy Demands

Once role claims are translated into operational language, they reveal a set of practical task requirements. These are not normative checklists, but functional conditions for role enactment. The translation from role to demand is deliberately conservative: a demand is identified only where the role claim clearly implies a task that the foreign policy system would have to perform.

First, strategic prioritization and sequencing are indispensable. Scaling ambition from domestic consolidation to global agenda-setting requires disciplined ordering of commitments. Without prioritization, role expansion may produce dilution, incoherent signaling, or overextension across too many arenas. Analytical capacity is therefore required not only to identify opportunities, but also to decide which opportunities should be deferred, narrowed, or avoided.

Second, coalition-building and convening capacity are central to bridge-building and agenda-setting roles. Brokerage requires networks, trust, procedural creativity, and follow-through. Convening is not merely the ability to host forums or issue statements. It requires agenda design, participant management, coalition maintenance, and the capacity to turn dialogue into cumulative influence. These tasks are particularly important when Indonesia seeks to act across ASEAN, the Muslim world, the Global South, and broader multilateral settings.

Third, diplomatic footprint and institutional infrastructure may become binding constraints as arenas of engagement expand. Wider role expectations increase demands on representation, expertise, and resource allocation. Diplomatic capacity scholarship is useful here because it grounds foreign policy capability in institutional traces such as budgets,

staffing, legal competences, professionalization, and the distribution of foreign services (Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019). This does not mean that every role requires large material expansion. It means that role claims become more credible when they leave institutional traces that can sustain action over time.

Fourth, whole-of-government coordination is essential. The “game changer” repertoire spans security, economic, religious, humanitarian, developmental, and diplomatic domains. No single ministry or diplomatic unit can carry these demands alone. System-building, humanitarian leadership, and agenda-setting require coordination routines, shared priorities, information flows, and implementation discipline across agencies. Fragmented coordination does not simply reduce efficiency; it can undermine the credibility of role enactment.

Fifth, domestic legitimation and narrative governance are structurally central in a democracy. Indonesia’s external positioning is shaped through narratives that link domestic identity and international recognition, especially around Islam, democracy, moderation, pluralism, and modernity, while such narratives are also politically constructed and externally interpreted within wider global discursive hierarchies (Huijgh, 2017; Tan, 2022; Umar, 2016). Model-making and moral leadership roles are especially sensitive to domestic contestation because they depend on the credibility of internal political arrangements. Domestic legitimation is therefore not a secondary communication task; it is part of the role’s operating condition.

Sixth, crisis responsiveness under contestation emerges as a recurring demand. Humanitarian-moral leadership and bridge-building are tested most sharply in crisis settings, where symbolic, diplomatic, and operational demands converge. Effective responsiveness requires rapid judgment, calibrated messaging, inter-agency coordination, access to relevant parties, and the ability to manage domestic expectations. Failure to respond visibly may damage moral credibility, but overexposure may reduce mediation flexibility. Crisis responsiveness is therefore a high-pressure test of the role-demand-capacity relationship.

Table 2. Role Claims in Indonesia’s “Game Changer” Narrative and Their Implied Policy Demands

Role claim (label)	Narrative basis (discursive anchor)	Implied foreign policy tasks	Typical instruments	Primary arena(s)
Model-maker / Model Muslim-majority democracy	Indonesia as a scalable social-political model that reconciles Islam, democracy, and modernity (Matta, 2014, 2024)	Reputation management; norm projection; agenda framing; peer-learning leadership	Public diplomacy; strategic communications; capacity-building initiatives; multilateral norm coalitions	UN forums; OIC-related spaces; G20/major summits; track 1.5/track 2 networks
Bridge-builder / mediator	Indonesia as connector across divides (Muslim–West; great powers–Global South; ideological cleavages) (Matta, 2014, 2024)	Mediation; coalition building; convening; de-escalation brokerage	Quiet diplomacy; shuttle diplomacy; convening dialogues; issue-based coalitions	ASEAN; UN; Indo-Pacific Minilateral and bilateral crisis channels

Humanitarian-moral leader	Moral leadership through solidarity and humanitarian responsibility, especially on high-salient humanitarian issues with Muslim solidarity dimensions (Matta, 2014, 2024)	Humanitarian access; norm signaling; crisis response; reputational protection	Humanitarian diplomacy; relief coordination; principled statements; low-escalation engagement	UN humanitarian system; ASEAN mechanisms; bilateral with conflict parties
Regional-to-global agenda-setter	Leadership beyond Southeast Asia; Indonesia as a consequential agenda-setter in wider Asia/global order (Matta, 2024)	Strategic agenda-setting; policy entrepreneurship; institutional design proposals	Niche diplomacy; policy initiatives; coalition entrepreneurship	ASEAN; Indo-Pacific architectures; global summits (e.g., G20)
Civilizational system-builder	Emphasis on converting moral consciousness into workable governance systems that produce outcomes (Matta, 2024)	Institutional upgrading; policy coherence; whole-of-government orchestration	Foreign policy coordination reforms; long-horizon planning; bureaucratic professionalization	Domestic reform arena; external projection effects

Table 2 summarizes the reconstructed role repertoire and its associated policy demands. The key analytic shift lies here: once translated into task requirements, the primary challenge is no longer inspirational vision but delivery burden. Role claims function as policy demand generators. Whether Indonesia can enact the “game changer” thesis depends less on the coherence of the narrative alone than on the state’s capacity to sustain these practical demands across time, institutions, and arenas.

Capacity Signatures and Deliverability Outcomes

This subsection addresses the question of where the “game changer” thesis is most likely to break, strain, or adapt once translated into operational demands. The core claim advanced here is that the primary constraints do not lie in a deficit of strategic imagination. Rather, they lie in recurrent capacity signatures—particularly at the organizational–operational and systemic–political levels—that become binding when multiple roles are pursued simultaneously. The analysis does not seek to disconfirm the narrative, but to identify the institutional conditions under which its enactment becomes fragile or selectively adaptive.

Applying the Capacity Diagnostic to the Role-Demand Structure

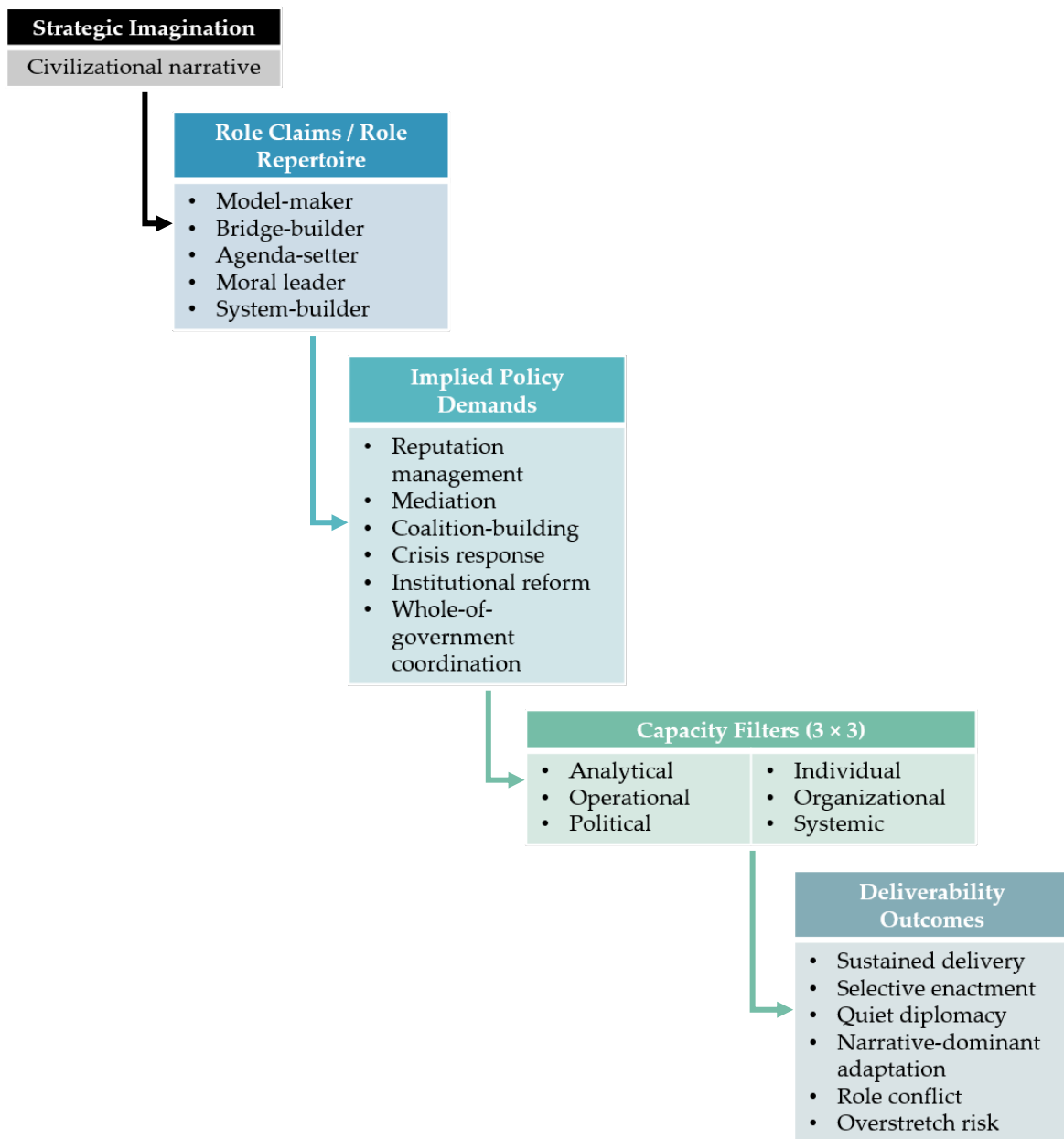
To move from role–demand translation to deliverability assessment, this study applies the policy capacity framework developed by Wu, Ramesh, and Howlett (2015) as a diagnostic tool rather than a measurement instrument. The analytical–operational–political × individual–organizational–systemic matrix (see Table 3) provides a structured way to identify which components are most likely to bind when the role repertoire is enacted. The framework is adapted to foreign policy tasks, where coordination across agencies, responsiveness under crisis, and institutional steadiness across political cycles are central.

In this adaptation, analytical capacity refers to prioritization and strategic coherence; operational capacity concerns coordination routines, bureaucratic infrastructure, and implementation follow-through; and political capacity encompasses domestic legitimation, coalition durability, and leadership alignment. Scholarship on foreign policy bureaucracy reinforces this emphasis. Gyngell and Wesley (2007) underscore that diplomatic

effectiveness depends on institutional coherence and strategic discipline, not simply ambition. Schiavon and Figueroa (2019) further demonstrate that diplomatic capacity is embedded in institutional traces—budgets, staffing, professionalization, and distribution of posts—rather than rhetorical positioning. As Figure 1 illustrates, strategic imagination generates role claims, which produce policy demands that are filtered through these capacity components before resulting in observable deliverability outcomes.

Figure 1 conceptualizes the analytical flow from civilizational strategic imagination to foreign policy deliverability. Strategic narratives generate a repertoire of role claims, which in turn produce implied policy demands. These demands are filtered through analytical, operational, and political capacities across individual, organizational, and systemic levels. Deliverability outcomes vary depending on which capacity components bind, generating patterns such as selective enactment, quiet diplomacy, role conflict, or sustained delivery.

Figure 1. From strategic imagination to capacity-filtered deliverability



Source: Author's elaboration

Recurrent Capacity Signatures

Applying this diagnostic to the reconstructed role–demand structure reveals several recurrent capacity signatures.

1. **Conversion gap (CS-1).** The first and most explicit signature is a conversion gap between moral–civilizational ambition and institutional translation. The 2024 text itself recognizes that political Islam has struggled to transform moral consciousness into “systemic thinking” applicable to governance (Matta, 2024, p. 5). This admission points to a structural challenge: articulating a civilizational vocation at high scale presupposes routines, inter-agency coordination, and policy design capacities that are costly and time-intensive to build. The gap does not negate the narrative; it indicates that governance conversion is the binding constraint.
2. **Scope expansion and sequencing strain (CS-2).** The narrative’s scaling logic—domestic consolidation, regional leadership, engagement with the Muslim world, and global agenda-setting—expands arenas of commitment more rapidly than institutional routines typically consolidate. Strategic prioritization becomes increasingly demanding as commitments multiply. Analytical capacity (prioritization discipline) and organizational–operational capacity (sustained follow-through) are simultaneously pressured. Without sequencing, agenda-setting risks fragmentation.
3. **Multi-role compression under contestation (CS-3).** The simultaneous pursuit of model-maker, mediator, humanitarian leader, and agenda-setter roles compresses distinct expectations into a single foreign policy posture. In a democratic setting, this compression heightens systemic–political strain. Domestic constituencies may diverge in their expectations, while external audiences may prescribe incompatible behaviors. Karim (2021) and Gryzwacz (2020) emphasis on domestic legitimation in role enactment is particularly relevant: sustaining multiple identity-linked roles increases the burden of coalition management and narrative governance.
4. **Will-centered diagnosis as capacity under-specification (CS-4).** At points, the corpus frames the problem as one of insufficient will rather than insufficient capacity. While political will is undeniably relevant, an exclusive focus on will risks obscuring structural bottlenecks embedded in coordination routines, bureaucratic infrastructure, and durable coalitions. The analysis does not suggest that the narrative is misguided; rather, it indicates that its internal diagnosis may understate the institutional costs of conversion.

Likely Deliverability Outcomes and Failure/Adaptation Modes

If these capacity signatures bind, what outcomes are most likely? Several recurrent modes of adaptation or strain can be inferred.

1. Quiet diplomacy as capacity-congruent adaptation. Where organizational–operational capacity is thin relative to ambition, low-visibility instruments may become attractive. Quiet mediation, selective convening, and bounded commitments can preserve reputational coherence while limiting coordination burdens. Smith and Williams (2021) note that quiet diplomacy is often a strategic choice rather than a retreat; in this

framework, it can represent alignment between available capacity and chosen instruments.

2. Role dilution or selective enactment. As demands accumulate, some roles may be enacted partially while others are deprioritized. Selective engagement allows states to manage sequencing strain, but it can also produce perceptions of inconsistency if expectations are not recalibrated.
3. Narrative-dominant adaptation. Strong political and narrative capacity, combined with weaker operational routines, may encourage a substitution effect in which messaging and symbolic positioning outpace institutional follow-through. This does not render public diplomacy ineffective; rather, it alters the balance between rhetorical projection and material commitment.
4. Role conflict and inconsistency. When domestic and international expectations diverge sharply, role enactment may oscillate. High-salience issues tied to identity intensify this dynamic, as highlighted in studies of role legitimation under contestation (Karim, 2021). In such contexts, shifts in instrument choice may reflect systemic–political strain rather than strategic incoherence.
5. Commitment inflation and overstretch risk. Overstretch is treated here as a conditional mechanism rather than an empirical verdict. Scholarship on overstretch (Florig, 2010; Pu & Wang, 2018; Schenoni et al., 2022) suggests that ambition can exceed capacity when legitimating foreign policy myths are sustained by permissive environments. In the present framework, overstretch risk would be indicated by expanding commitments without corresponding institutional trace—particularly in diplomatic infrastructure and coordination reforms. Whether this threshold is crossed is an empirical question; analytically, it remains a risk mechanism embedded in the role–demand–capacity interaction.

Table 3. Policy deliverability diagnostic matrix for foreign policy

Capacity domain	Individual	Organizational	Systemic
Analytical capacity	• <i>Definition:</i> strategic analysis skills and judgment. • <i>Examples:</i> prioritization; scenario sense-making. • <i>Deficit risk:</i> agenda inflation; incoherent signaling.	• <i>Definition:</i> analytical routines embedded in organizations. • <i>Examples:</i> strategy units; policy evaluation loops; inter-agency analysis. • <i>Deficit risk:</i> fragmented assessments; weak prioritization discipline.	• <i>Definition:</i> system-level knowledge and intelligence ecosystem. • <i>Examples:</i> data infrastructure; policy learning across government. • <i>Deficit risk:</i> chronic miscalibration of commitments.
Operational capacity	• <i>Definition:</i> implementation know-how and managerial competence. • <i>Examples:</i> project execution; negotiation craft. • <i>Deficit risk:</i> reliance on ad hoc fixes.	• <i>Definition:</i> machinery for coordination and delivery. • <i>Examples:</i> inter-agency coordination; staffing; budgeting; SOPs. • <i>Deficit risk:</i> implementation gaps; episodic diplomacy.	• <i>Definition:</i> state's resource mobilization and administrative reach. • <i>Examples:</i> diplomatic footprint; professionalization; legal competences.

			• <i>Deficit risk</i>: presence–capacity mismatch; thin sustainment.
Political capacity	• <i>Definition</i>: persuasion and coalition skills. • <i>Examples</i>: stakeholder management; parliamentary engagement. • <i>Deficit risk</i>: legitimacy shocks and policy reversal.	• <i>Definition</i>: organizational legitimation and communications capability. • <i>Examples</i>: coordinated messaging; crisis communications; managing domestic contestation. • <i>Deficit risk</i>: role conflict; inconsistent posture.	• <i>Definition</i>: system-level legitimacy and governance stability. • <i>Examples</i>: durable coalitions; societal trust; institutionalized accountability. • <i>Deficit risk</i>: contested mandates; high discount rates for external commitments.

Source: Adapted conceptually from policy capacity frameworks in public policy scholarship (Wu et al., 2015) and foreign policy capacity discussions (e.g., Gyngell & Wesley, 2007), with diplomatic infrastructure indicators aligned with measurement-oriented work (e.g., Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019).

If space permits, Table 3 summarizes these linkages across roles, demands, capacity components, and likely outcomes. The broader implication is that deliverability hinges less on the coherence of the “game changer” narrative and more on how organizational–operational and systemic–political capacities filter its enactment. Ambition, in this sense, functions as an institutional stress test: it reveals where routines hold, where they strain, and where adaptation becomes necessary.

Indonesia Focused Analytic Illustration

This subsection demonstrates how the framework operates diagnostically through mechanism illustration rather than comprehensive performance audit. The aim is not to evaluate Indonesia’s foreign policy across all domains, nor to test whether the “game changer” narrative has directly shaped state behaviour. Rather, the aim is to show that existing Indonesia-focused scholarship reveals patterns consistent with the proposed diagnosis: deliverability depends on the interaction between domestic legitimation, coordination capacity, and instrument choice, not merely on the coherence or scale of strategic narratives. Three focused vignettes illustrate this interaction.

Domestic Legitimation and Role Adjustment in High-Salience Issues

Indonesia’s behaviour during its 2007–2008 term on the United Nations Security Council offers a clear illustration of domestic legitimation shaping role enactment. Gindarsah’s (2012) analysis of Indonesia’s shifting position on Iran-related sanctions shows how domestic political pressures, particularly from Muslim constituencies and political actors, conditioned the consistency and exposure tolerance of foreign policy choices. In such a setting, international role enactment was not determined only by Indonesia’s external commitments or diplomatic preferences. It was also filtered through the domestic political costs of appearing to support sanctions against a Muslim-majority country.

From the perspective of the present framework, the mechanism at work is not simply that “domestic politics matters.” Rather, systemic-political capacity becomes binding when high-salience issues intersect with identity-linked expectations. Role theory underscores

that international role enactment requires domestic recognition and coalition management, especially in democracies where external activism may invite contestation (Karim, 2021). When domestic coalitions are fragmented or politically costly to consolidate, foreign policy instruments may shift toward ambiguity, abstention, recalibration, or calibrated positioning to manage internal exposure.

This episode thus illustrates the domestic legitimation demand cluster under binding systemic-political capacity. The resulting deliverability outcome is best described as role adjustment under contestation. The point is not that Indonesia failed to perform its role, but that instrument choice was filtered through domestic legitimacy constraints. The vignette confirms that ambitious role claims, such as moral leadership or principled positioning, are mediated by political coalitions and identity dynamics that shape consistency, timing, and exposure tolerance.

Intermeshic Public Diplomacy and Narrative Governance

Indonesia's practice of public diplomacy provides a second mechanism illustration. Scholarship on Indonesian foreign policy and public diplomacy shows that narratives linking Islam, democracy, moderation, pluralism, and modernity have been used to position Indonesia for both domestic and international audiences. At the same time, these narratives are politically constructed, externally interpreted, and sometimes embedded in hierarchical global discourses (Huijgh, 2017; Tan, 2022; Umar, 2016). Sukma (2011) similarly situates Indonesia's soft power and democratic identity as important elements of its post-authoritarian external positioning.

Through the present framework, this practice can be interpreted as capacity-congruent adaptation. Where political and narrative capacities are relatively robust, particularly in constructing legitimacy across domestic and international audiences, public diplomacy becomes a comparatively low-cost instrument for enacting model-maker and bridge-builder roles. Narrative governance enables Indonesia to maintain reputational coherence while navigating identity-linked sensitivities at home. It also allows role enactment to proceed through discursive, symbolic, and convening instruments even where larger operational commitments would be more difficult to sustain.

However, the framework also identifies a conditional risk. If narrative projection is not accompanied by sustained organizational-operational investment, such as institutional follow-through, coordination routines, and policy implementation, the result may approximate narrative-dominant adaptation. Messaging and symbolic positioning become more prominent than material delivery, and reputation risks becoming weakly connected to institutional trace. This is not to suggest that public diplomacy is merely cosmetic. Narrative instruments can generate recognition, legitimacy, and convening power. Yet their effectiveness remains contingent on integration with operational capacity.

In diagnostic terms, this vignette illustrates the domestic legitimation and narrative governance demand cluster interacting with uneven organizational-operational capacity. The deliverability outcome is adaptive: role enactment is sustained primarily through discursive and reputational instruments, with material commitments calibrated to manageable levels. This adaptation may be rational under capacity constraints, but it also leaves open the question of whether reputational claims can be sustained if operational follow-through remains thin.

Regional Agenda-Setting, Convening, and Coordination Burdens

Indonesia's regional agenda-setting, particularly in ASEAN and Indo-Pacific contexts, offers a third illustration. Agastia (2020) analyzes Indonesia's role in advancing the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as an attempt to locate its middle-power role within the emerging Indo-Pacific structure, especially through regional leader and bridge-builder roles. Acharya (2014) similarly situates Indonesia as an emerging democratic power with normative influence in regional order-building. These works show that Indonesia has demonstrated credible agenda-setting and convening capacity through regional framing, norm articulation, and institutional entrepreneurship.

Yet agenda-setting success does not automatically translate into uniform implementation capacity across domains. Febrica's (2017) study of Indonesia's maritime security cooperation is useful here because it demonstrates that cooperation outcomes depend not only on strategic relevance or regional identity, but also on costs, benefits, sovereignty concerns, implementation requirements, and domestic bureaucratic processes. Maritime and security cooperation involves multiple actors, including foreign affairs, defence, transport, naval, and other technical agencies, making coordination and implementation burdens central to whether commitments can be carried through. This supports the diagnostic claim that regional leadership and convening may generate reputational gains while still encountering organizational-operational constraints.

The diagnostic mechanism here centers on coordination burden. As agenda-setting expands, so does the demand for sustained institutional routines. Initiating frameworks, hosting dialogues, and articulating regional principles reflect strategic entrepreneurship and reputational leverage, but sustaining initiatives requires inter-agency coordination, budget alignment, policy sequencing, legal and technical follow-through, and professionalized implementation. Success at the level of convening or framing may therefore coexist with uneven follow-through in implementation. This coexistence does not negate leadership; it reveals differentiated capacity across task clusters.

Across the three vignettes, a consistent pattern emerges. Deliverability bottlenecks recurrently appear at the intersection of organizational-operational and systemic-political capacity. Domestic legitimation pressures condition instrument choice in high-salience issues; narrative governance functions as a capacity-congruent adaptation; and regional agenda-setting illustrates how reputational success can coexist with coordination strain. Adaptations such as selective enactment, calibrated positioning, narrative-dominant adaptation, and quiet diplomacy appear repeatedly, not as failures, but as filtered outcomes of capacity constraints. Read in this light, the "game changer" thesis functions less as a forecast and more as an institutional stress test: it reveals where conversion burdens accumulate and where adaptation becomes structurally rational.

Theoretical and Comparative Implications

The analysis reframes civilizational strategic imagination as a program of statecraft rather than a predictive claim about national rise. Its theoretical contribution lies in specifying a conversion mechanism: strategic imagination generates role claims, role claims generate implied policy demands, and those demands are filtered through capacity configurations before they become deliverable foreign policy practice. This moves the analysis beyond two

common readings of ambition: treating it either as rhetorical projection or as a claim to be judged only against material capability. Ambition becomes analytically productive when it is translated into institutional work requirements, including prioritization, coalition-building, diplomatic infrastructure, domestic legitimation, crisis response, and whole-of-government coordination.

Heuristically, the concept of capacity signatures offers a portable diagnostic tool. It helps identify patterned bottlenecks that condition role enactment, especially at the organizational-operational and systemic-political levels. The concept does not measure foreign policy capacity in a comprehensive sense. Rather, it identifies where specific role claims are most likely to strain available capabilities. In this respect, the framework builds on policy capacity scholarship by using the analytical, operational, and political dimensions as a diagnostic filter, while adapting that filter to foreign policy tasks that require diplomatic steadiness, institutional coordination, and political legitimation (Wu et al., 2015). Diplomatic capacity scholarship reinforces this emphasis on institutional trace, while role legitimation research highlights the political filtering of international commitments in democratic settings (Karim, 2021; Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019).

Comparatively, the framework has heuristic relevance beyond Indonesia, especially for Muslim-majority democracies and other states that combine identity-based external projection with institutional and political constraints. Three propositions follow from the analysis. First, civilizational strategic imagination can expand role repertoires and raise policy demands by linking domestic identity, regional leadership, and global positioning. Second, deliverability bottlenecks are likely to arise where organizational-operational coordination and systemic-political legitimation become simultaneously demanding. Third, under such constraints, adaptation is likely to take the form of quiet diplomacy, selective enactment, narrative-dominant adaptation, or calibrated role adjustment rather than full-spectrum delivery. Overstretch, as debated in middle-power scholarship, remains a conditional risk rather than an inevitable outcome (Schenoni et al., 2022).

The broader implication is that foreign policy ambition should be evaluated not by the scale of its rhetoric alone, nor only by aggregate material benchmarks, but by the institutional conversion it can sustain. Strategic imagination becomes analytically valuable when treated as an upstream stressor that exposes the structure, unevenness, and limits of state capacity. In this sense, the “game changer” thesis is useful not because it predicts Indonesia’s rise, but because it reveals the work that such a rise would require.

Conclusion

This article has reframed the “game changer” thesis not as a forecast of Indonesia’s rise, but as a programmatic form of strategic imagination that generates institutional work for the state. By reconstructing the narrative architecture of Anis Matta’s civilizational argument and translating it into a repertoire of role claims, the analysis has shown that ambition operates as a generator of implied policy demands. These demands, including prioritization, coalition-building, diplomatic footprint, coordination, domestic legitimation, and crisis responsiveness, constitute practical tasks that must be carried through institutional routines rather than sustained by rhetoric alone.

The central analytical move has been to specify a conversion mechanism between strategic imagination and foreign policy deliverability. Drawing on the analytical-operational-political by individual-organizational-systemic matrix developed by Wu et al. (2015), and informed by scholarship on diplomatic and bureaucratic capacity (Gyngell & Wesley, 2007; Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019), the article identified recurrent capacity signatures. The most binding constraints are not deficiencies of vision or strategic imagination. They tend to appear in organizational-operational routines, including coordination, sequencing, and sustained follow-through, and in systemic-political capacity, including durable domestic legitimation, coalition stability, and governance trust. When multiple roles are pursued simultaneously, these components become pressure points.

The Indonesia-focused illustrations reinforce this diagnosis. In high-salience issues such as the Iran sanctions episode, domestic contestation conditioned instrument choice and consistency, demonstrating how systemic-political capacity shapes role enactment (Gindarsah, 2012; Karim, 2021). In intermestic public diplomacy, narrative governance has functioned as a capacity-congruent adaptation, sustaining reputational coherence while managing domestic identity dynamics and international recognition pressures (Huijgh, 2017; Tan, 2022; Umar, 2016). In regional agenda-setting, Indonesia has displayed credible role entrepreneurship, yet coordination and sustainment burdens reveal uneven organizational-operational depth (Agastia, 2020; Febrica, 2017). Across domains, deliverability outcomes reflect patterned interaction between demand clusters and capacity filters rather than simple success-failure binaries.

Two broader contributions follow. First, the article clarifies how civilizational aspiration is converted into foreign policy work requirements. Strategic imagination expands role repertoires; roles generate policy demands; demands are filtered through capacity structures; and outcomes vary depending on which capacity components become binding. This conversion logic moves analysis beyond discursive reconstruction without reducing ambition to material output indicators alone. Second, the concept of capacity signatures offers a portable heuristic for diagnosing foreign policy strain. It helps distinguish among adaptive instrument choice, selective enactment, narrative-dominant adaptation, role conflict, and conditional overstretch risk without prematurely labelling ambition as failure (Schenoni et al., 2022).

The findings suggest that civilizational ambition in Muslim-majority democracies should be understood as an institutional stress test. High-scale narratives amplify expectations and multiply tasks. Deliverability then depends on whether coordination routines, diplomatic infrastructure, and domestic legitimation coalitions can sustain expanded commitments. Where these foundations are thin or contested, adaptation through calibrated instruments becomes rational rather than anomalous. Where investment in institutional conversion matches ambition, sustained role enactment becomes more plausible.

This study has not sought to provide a comprehensive audit of Indonesia's foreign policy performance, nor to adjudicate the normative desirability of the "game changer" vision. Instead, it has treated strategic imagination as analytically productive when translated into institutional work requirements and tested through capacity constraints. Future research could apply the framework to primary diplomatic resource data, elite

interviews, or comparative cases of Muslim-majority democracies to examine how different capacity configurations shape foreign policy deliverability. The central implication is straightforward: ambition is not self-validating. Its durability rests on the often-invisible architecture of coordination, legitimacy, and bureaucratic infrastructure that converts aspiration into practice.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflict interest.

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