

Articulating Power: Strategic Narratives and Indonesia's Imagined Role in a Multipolar World

Jacob Junian Endiartia

Sekretariat Jenderal Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Received Oct, 2025

Revised Oct, 2025

Accepted Oct, 2025

Keywords:

Indonesia Foreign Policy;
National Role Conceptions;
Strategic Narratives

ABSTRACT

This article investigates how strategic narratives articulated by domestic political elites shape national role conceptions in emerging powers. Focusing on the case of Indonesian political figure Anis Matta, the study employs an integrated framework combining Role Theory and Strategic Narrative Theory. Through textual analysis of Matta's speeches and writings between 2014 and 2024, the article reveals a coherent narrative that reimagines Indonesia as a "peacemaker of civilisation" amid global disruption. It finds that narrative framing, moral positioning, and ideological continuity enable ideational elites to project new international roles prior to formal policy adoption. The study contributes to Foreign Policy Analysis by highlighting the discursive agency of non-executive actors in the pre-policy phase, offering insights into how emerging powers construct their foreign policy identities in an evolving multipolar order.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](#) license.



Corresponding Author:

Name: Jacob Junian Endiartia

Institution: Sekretariat Jenderal Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia

Email: endiartia@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The liberal international order is under acute strain. Systemic disruptions, including institutional gridlock, intensifying great-power rivalry, and ideological fatigue, have unsettled long-standing norms and authority structures [1], [2]. The consequences are material and ideational. As the post-Cold War narrative of liberal hegemony recedes, a widening cast of actors is attempting to redefine the parameters of global order. The result is a form of discursive multipolarity in which competing claims to legitimacy and leadership proliferate [3], [4].

In this shifting environment,

strategic narratives have become essential instruments through which political elites attempt to shape international identities and reposition their states within the global hierarchy [5], [6]. These narratives do not simply mirror power. They operate as power. Through storytelling, elites curate the past, diagnose the present, and project futures aligned with their strategic aims [7]. Although often associated with dominant powers, this approach is especially pertinent for emerging states whose material resources are constrained while their ideational ambitions remain expansive.

The article examines a salient case from the Global South, namely Anis Matta's narrative of Indonesia as a "New

Superpower.” A veteran legislator and intellectual figure, Matta entered the executive in 2024 as a deputy foreign minister after a period of leadership within the Gelora Party. Despite the party’s limited electoral reach, his discursive production has been prolific. He envisions Indonesia as a civilizational actor uniquely equipped to mediate a fractured international system, a “peacemaker of civilisation” grounded in historical resilience, moral clarity, and geopolitical equidistance.

This vision, though not yet institutionalised, warrants analysis for three reasons. First, it arises from within the political elite but outside the customary centres of foreign policy formulation. Second, it resonates with wider ideological currents in the Global South that question Western-centric models of order. Third, it advances a redefinition of Indonesia’s national role conception beyond its conventional identity as non-aligned or as a middle power, proposing a forward-leaning, civilisation-centred role in a multipolar setting.

The study asks: how do strategic narratives articulated by domestic political elites seek to reshape national role conceptions in emerging powers? To address this question, the article brings together two strands of Foreign Policy Analysis: strategic narrative theory and role theory. The former highlights the discursive agency of political actors. The latter examines the social construction and contestation of national identities within foreign policy processes [7], [8].

The article also foregrounds the influence of semi-institutional actors who may not control formal policy but shape the ideational terrain through discourse. It argues that elite narratives matter in the pre-policy phase of foreign policy. They accumulate symbolic capital that can be activated when political opportunities emerge. The case of Anis Matta shows that narratives function not only as *ex post* justifications for policy but as forward-looking propositions for national transformation on the international stage.

Ultimately, the article positions

narrative as constitutive of foreign policy identity. Rather than treating discourse as derivative of material power, it centres ideational agency as a driver of role formation. By tracing how strategic narratives articulate new meanings and ambitions, the study widens the analytical lens of Foreign Policy Analysis and advances an interpretive, ideationally attentive framework for understanding how emerging powers imagine and assert their roles in a changing world order [9].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Role theory in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) was first systematised by [10], who introduced national role conceptions (NRCs) as policymakers’ images of appropriate state behaviour in the international system. He outlined a typology of 17 NRCs, from regional leader to bastion of revolution, derived from role prescriptions and historical identities. Subsequent work refined this framework. [11] categorised NRCs by decision-makers’ subjective perceptions. [8], [12] developed role theory as a bridge between constructivist and neoclassical realist approaches. [13] traced continuity and change in NRCs among post-colonial states. [14] recentred the theory’s analytical leverage on the agent–structure nexus, framing roles as contested and co-constructed within domestic and systemic arenas.

These debates underscore the theory’s sensitivity to ideational agency as well as structural constraint. Recent critiques question the Western-centrism of role typologies and call for contextualisation in the Global South. For emerging powers, whose systemic position is fluid and discursively shaped, role theory is well suited to tracking identity shifts and behavioural change. The flexibility of NRCs enables scholars to show how political elites actively recalibrate foreign policy orientations over time, although research has tended to prioritise formal state actors and to sideline ideational figures outside government.

Strategic Narrative Theory (SNT), originating in international communication studies, offers a complementary lens. Pioneered by [7], SNT defines strategic narratives as the means by which political actors construct shared understandings of the past, present, and future of international order. The framework distinguishes among system narratives that articulate macro-order, identity narratives that shape national self-perception, and issue narratives that justify specific policies. [15] advanced the theory's operationalisation by arguing that effective narratives depend on credibility, congruence with audience values, and strategic repetition across media.

An expanding literature applies SNT to a range of actors, including rising powers and, at times, non-state or ideational elites. [16] show how China builds discursive hegemony through layered narratives. [17] details Russia's narrative strategies for contesting liberal norms. These studies demonstrate SNT's value for tracing how actors seek legitimacy, mobilise opinion, and project influence across borders, whether or not they control formal policy levers.

Despite clear affinities, the integration of role theory and SNT remains limited. [18], [19] link the two by treating strategic narratives as mechanisms of role performance and adaptation, yet their accounts remain largely descriptive and stop short of a unified model. [16] point to the promise of combining discourse-centred narrative analysis with role-based positioning in international society, but the field still lacks a robust conceptual apparatus for this synthesis.

This gap is particularly salient for analysing political elites who operate outside formal executive institutions. Traditional FPA has focused on decision-makers within state bureaucracies, thereby privileging formal processes. [20] reminds us that foreign policy is ultimately produced by human agency, which calls for attention to how ideas, identities, and intentions take shape before institutionalisation. [21] similarly urges greater focus on the ideational foundations of power and

influence, especially among actors who articulate national purpose through discourse rather than coercion. A broader conception of agency is required, one that includes party leaders, movement intellectuals, and ideologues in the long-term shaping of foreign policy orientations.

A small but growing literature has begun to meet this challenge. Studies of party discourse, ideological narratives, and pre-policy debates suggest that the seeds of future foreign policy shifts are often planted well before elite actors gain executive authority. Such actors contribute to role contestation, prepare audiences for strategic change, and shape the interpretive frames through which international events are understood. Their influence remains underexamined in FPA, particularly with respect to the Global South.

This article addresses these gaps by analysing how a politically experienced yet ideationally driven figure, Anis Matta, constructs strategic narratives that seek to redefine Indonesia's role in the world. It develops a conceptual framework that integrates SNT with role theory and applies it to the ideational activity of a non-executive elite. In doing so, it expands understanding of how roles are articulated before they are enacted and shows how narrative leadership can recalibrate national self-conceptions in a multipolar order.

Theoretical Framework

This article develops an integrated framework that combines Role Theory and Strategic Narrative Theory to explain how ideational elites in emerging powers seek to reconstruct national role conceptions through narrative practice. In Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), Role Theory, introduced by [10], examines how policymakers conceive their state's place in international society. These national role conceptions (NRCs) function as interpretive frames that guide behaviour, shaped by domestic expectations and external prescriptions. Subsequent work by [8], [12] refined the approach by emphasising role contestation, socialisation, and the

intersubjective negotiation of roles.

Yet Role Theory has limited leverage for explaining the discursive mechanisms through which roles take shape in early phases of foreign policy ideation, especially outside established institutions. [20] calls for more actor-centred FPA, highlighting the agency of individuals and non-state actors in shaping outcomes. This is particularly apt for ideational actors in the Global South, whose interventions often precede or exceed formal policy frameworks. To address this gap, the article turns to Strategic Narrative Theory (SNT) as a complementary lens.

SNT, as articulated by [7], explains how political actors deploy narratives to shape perceptions of international order, national identity, and issue agendas. Narratives are not merely rhetorical; they are constitutive, linking a state's past, present, and future. SNT distinguishes three core types: system narratives that describe the structure and legitimacy of order, identity narratives that define national self-understandings, and issue narratives that justify specific policies. [15] further develops the notion of narrative competition, in which multiple actors vie to impose their vision of international reality.

While Role Theory clarifies the roles actors perform, SNT illuminates how those roles are framed, communicated, and legitimised. Integration remains rare. Notable exceptions include [18] analysis of BRICS discourse and [19] study of strategic narratives in emerging powers. As [16] argue in their account of China's discursive hegemony, the field still lacks models that link narrative construction to shifts in role conception. This article addresses that gap by proposing a framework that treats narrative articulation as a mechanism of role redefinition, particularly in pre-policy settings.

The framework advances three analytic dimensions. First, narrative framing captures how actors construe global crises or transitions as openings for new international roles, aligning Role Theory's sensitivity to situational change with SNT's focus on reconfiguring temporal and spatial context.

Second, temporal sequencing traces how consistency and historical depth in narrative claims bolster legitimacy, enabling emerging powers to present themselves as heirs to enduring civilisational missions. Third, normative positioning identifies the values and ethical claims embedded in narratives that morally legitimise proposed roles and distinguish them from those of established powers.

This integrated approach is well suited to contexts in which ideational entrepreneurs articulate foreign policy visions before they hold executive office. Such conditions often characterise emerging powers in the Global South, where elite discourse is central to constructing legitimacy and imagining alternative futures. Building on scholarship that foregrounds the constructed character of international identity [1], [21], [22], the framework enables a relational and performative account of how roles are not only enacted but narrated into being.

By combining Role Theory's concern with intersubjective role formation and SNT's attention to discursive agency, the framework offers a novel lens for analysing how domestic political actors, especially those in transitional or contested positions, operate as ideational agents in shaping national identity. It also broadens FPA's methodological repertoire by incorporating tools from narrative and discourse analysis that are suited to investigating early, pre-institutional stages of role evolution in international affairs.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology to investigate how political elites articulate strategic narratives that reshape national role conceptions. The case of Anis Matta was selected due to his unique position as a long-serving legislator who, despite leading a minor party, transitioned into the executive branch as a deputy foreign minister in 2024. His narrative authority derives not from electoral dominance but from his sustained

intellectual output and capacity to project coherent, long-term visions for Indonesia's international identity. As such, he represents a semi-institutional political actor whose discursive influence precedes and may inform institutionalised foreign policy.

The analytical approach is based on *strategic narrative analysis*, embedded within an interpretive epistemology. It focuses on how narratives construct meaning by linking past trajectories, present crises, and future projections [7]. The narrative elements examined include setting, actors, plot structure, temporality, and moral framing. These are analysed in relation to national role conceptions as understood in Role Theory—specifically, the narrative construction of scope of action, international purpose, relational positioning, and counter-role expectations [10], [12].

The corpus of data includes a combination of written and oral texts produced by Anis Matta between 2023 and 2024. Key sources are two books—*Gelombang Ketiga Indonesia* [23] and *Indonesia sebagai Game Changer* [24]—as well as public speeches and interviews archived by media outlets such as geloraTV, Kompas.com, and Bisniscom. Transcripts of video recordings were consulted as primary material for discourse analysis. A structured summary generated by Google NotebookLM was used as a navigational aid to trace statements to their original sources and ensure thematic coherence across different texts; however, it is not treated as a primary source.

The study adopts a hermeneutic stance, aiming not to generalise across cases but to understand the embedded meanings and intentions within a specific discursive context. Validity is established through intersubjective plausibility, source triangulation, and transparent reasoning. While the study does not assess policy impact or institutional uptake of the narrative, it contributes to FPA by illuminating the ideational groundwork laid during the pre-policy phase—often an overlooked domain where role conceptions are imagined, contested, and proposed.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Empirical Analysis

This section offers an empirical examination of how strategic narratives articulated by ideational elites can shape national role conceptions in emerging powers. It centres on Anis Matta, a prominent Indonesian political figure and ideological leader of Partai Gelora, who advances a vision of Indonesia as a “new superpower.” Through public speeches, books, and media appearances between 2023 and 2024, Matta constructs an ambitious narrative that seeks to redefine Indonesia's global position and civilisational purpose.

Rather than analysing formal foreign policy outputs, the study adopts a pre-policy perspective that treats political discourse as a site where alternative international identities and role expectations are negotiated. Using narrative and discourse analysis, it investigates how Matta's strategic narratives frame global crises, propose counter-roles, and invoke moral authority to legitimise Indonesia's ascent. His interventions are ideational and strategic, designed to embed new role conceptions within Indonesia's wider political imagination.

The analysis proceeds through six thematic subsections that unpack core dimensions of the narrative: the contextual emergence of the discourse, crisis as opportunity, moral exceptionalism, ideological evolution, role differentiation, and long-term narrative consistency. Taken together, these components show how a non-governing political elite can operate as a narrative entrepreneur who advances aspirational roles with the potential to shape future foreign policy orientations.

a. Contextualising the Emergence of the Narrative

The articulation of Indonesia as a “new superpower” by Anis Matta emerged amid a perceived breakdown of the existing global order, which he terms a “crisis of civilisation.” This framing serves not merely as a reaction to global instability, but as a foundational element that legitimises Indonesia’s bid for greater international influence. Across his public interventions, Matta consistently situates the narrative within what he describes as an epochal transformation—a global “moment of change” necessitating the emergence of a new, morally grounded leadership model [25], [26]. His choice to position Indonesia at the heart of this shift reflects both a normative aspiration and a strategic reimagining of national identity on the world stage.

Matta’s unique political positioning reinforces the discursive power of this narrative. Although his party, Gelora, did not win legislative seats in the 2024 general election, Matta was appointed to a senior foreign policy post within the administration, which he frames not as a contradiction but as validation of his ideological and visionary credentials [27]. This paradox—political marginality coupled with executive access—amplifies the legitimacy of his ideas, allowing him to cast himself as an ideational outsider operating within the state apparatus. In this liminal position, Matta exercises narrative agency, not as a conventional policymaker, but as

an architect of strategic imagination.

The roots of Matta’s discourse trace back at least a decade, establishing a coherent ideological trajectory. In [23], he introduces a theory of cyclical civilisational change, where the decline of dominant powers heralds the rise of new moral leaders. This interpretive schema re-emerges in [24], where he argues that Indonesia’s historical trials—colonialism, ideological conflict, and democratic transition—constitute moral capital that uniquely qualifies it for global leadership. These texts form the theoretical backbone of his evolving political discourse and provide the ideological infrastructure for his superpower thesis.

The narrative gains further definition through six interrelated themes that Matta repeatedly emphasises as Indonesia’s “strategic assets”: moral authority, demographic weight, global diaspora, ecological stewardship, cultural resilience, and geopolitical neutrality [28]. These themes are not ad hoc, but are arranged as an integrated framework, supporting his assertion that Indonesia’s superpower potential lies not in hard power but in civilisational contribution. The deliberate curation of these attributes reflects a discursive strategy aimed at transforming Indonesia’s role conception from passive middle power to ethical architect of a multipolar world order.

This section therefore establishes the foundational context in which Matta’s narrative was conceived and disseminated. His positioning as

an ideational actor, his consistent invocation of civilisational themes, and his integration into state institutions suggest a form of narrative agency that seeks to redefine Indonesia's international identity at a formative pre-policy stage. By embedding his ideas across party platforms, public media, and intellectual texts, Matta has forged a coherent narrative that challenges traditional role expectations and invites a reimagining of Indonesia's place in global politics.

b. Crisis and Opportunity: The Narrative of Global Disruption

Anis Matta's narrative construction begins with a trenchant critique of the contemporary global order, which he characterises as undergoing a systemic crisis of civilisation. This diagnosis encompasses a range of interlinked challenges—geopolitical instability, normative fragmentation, ecological degradation, and economic uncertainty—all of which are framed as symptoms of a declining Western-led order [27], [29]. Rather than presenting these developments as threats, Matta reinterprets them as a structural opportunity: a rare moment in history when the rules of global engagement are malleable, and new actors can assert leadership. His narrative thus operates within a temporal logic of disruption-as-opening.

Matta's crisis framing is not purely descriptive; it is overtly strategic. He argues that Indonesia's window of opportunity coincides with the "terminal crisis" of previous hegemonic orders, as evident in conflicts in Ukraine, the South

China Sea, and broader patterns of strategic rivalry among major powers [28]. He contends that such turbulence indicates a transition phase between old and new epochs of civilisational leadership. Within this liminal space, emerging powers are called upon to fill a vacuum—not through domination, but through offering ethical alternatives. He warns, however, that historical junctures are fleeting; they demand intentional mobilisation and visionary leadership, lest the opportunity be lost [26].

This interpretation draws upon Matta's earlier theoretical position in [23], where he outlines a cyclical model of historical transformation. He posits that history progresses through waves—periods of civilisational ascendancy followed by moral decline and eventual renewal. In his more recent work, [24], this cycle is updated to emphasise the specific geopolitical alignments and disruptions of the post-COVID, post-unipolar world. Matta asserts that Indonesia's historical resilience—its capacity to endure and adapt through colonialism, ideological conflict, and democratic transition—prepares it uniquely to respond to this moment of global reconfiguration.

In this context, Matta presents Indonesia not as a peripheral beneficiary of multipolarity but as its moral anchor and strategic articulator. He contends that the country's geographic centrality, demographic scale, and Islamic-democratic synthesis position it to shape new norms and

institutions reflective of the twenty-first century's plural realities [25], [30]. The crisis, therefore, is not merely one of power politics but of civilisational purpose—a vacuum of global direction that Indonesia is called to fill. By reframing disruption as providence, Matta elevates his narrative from political proposition to civilisational imperative.

Lastly, Matta's diagnosis of global disruption functions as a legitimising discourse for national transformation. He implies that if Indonesia fails to act decisively in this moment, it will consign itself to irrelevance in the evolving world order [24]. In contrast, by embracing its destiny as a "game changer," Indonesia can rewrite the terms of international engagement and assume a role that transcends the developmentalist narratives of the past. The crisis thus becomes a canvas onto which a new, assertive, and ethically grounded Indonesian role conception is painted—transforming disorder into opportunity, and uncertainty into strategic imagination.

c. Moral Authority and the Civilisational Exceptionalism of Indonesia

Anis Matta's strategic narrative is anchored in the assertion that Indonesia possesses a unique moral and civilisational identity. He contends that Indonesia's pluralistic heritage, moderate Islamic identity, and historical experiences with colonialism and ideological contestation endow it with the ethical maturity to lead in global affairs. This narrative presents Indonesia not merely as

a rising power but as a "moral superpower"—a nation whose leadership derives not from coercive capability but from moral legitimacy and civilisational depth [24], [28].

A central rhetorical device in Matta's discourse is the invocation of Indonesia as "*rahmat bagi semesta*" (a mercy to the universe), a term drawn from Islamic theology. He reinterprets this concept in secular-civilisational terms, positioning Indonesia as a source of inclusive peace, compassion, and intercultural harmony. Matta argues that unlike the West's legacy of imperialism or China's authoritarian capitalism, Indonesia represents a softer, more humane model of leadership for a fractured world [25], [27].

In several public appearances, Matta underscores Indonesia's historical resilience, citing its successful navigation of ideological upheavals and democratic transition as evidence of its readiness to mediate global tensions. He contrasts Indonesia's "civilisational calm" with the perceived decadence and disorder of other powers, proposing that moral authority, not military might, should define global leadership in the twenty-first century [23], [24]. This redefinition of power aligns with his broader civilisational narrative, wherein Indonesia's historical burdens are recast as sources of spiritual and diplomatic capital.

This narrative of moral exceptionalism is not simply aspirational; it is intended to legitimise a particular kind of global agency. By drawing

attention to Indonesia's cultural hybridity, ethical pluralism, and peaceful diplomatic traditions, Matta constructs a national self-image capable of transcending the binary logics of the Cold War or great-power rivalry. Indonesia, in this vision, does not join the competition among superpowers but redefines the terms of global engagement itself—as a peacemaker rooted in civilisational dignity and moral purpose [29], [30].

d. From *Rahmat bagi Semesta* to Peacemaker of Civilisation

Anis Matta's strategic narrative moves from religiously inflected identity markers to a more universal civilisational register. What begins with the Islamic idiom *rahmat bagi semesta*, which evokes mercy, compassion, and benevolence, is recast as the more globally intelligible role of a "peacemaker of civilisation." The shift does not abandon Indonesia's Islamic heritage. It reframes that heritage to widen Indonesia's moral and diplomatic reach in international forums [24], [25].

As a peacemaker of civilisation, Indonesia is presented not as a neutral onlooker but as an architect of dialogue, reconciliation, and ethical global governance. For Matta, the country's distinctive synthesis of democracy, religious moderation, and civilisational humility equips it to mediate conflicts and address the moral crises of contemporary world politics. Indonesia thus appears as an ethical facilitator within a fractured multipolar order, more than a peaceful state [27], [30].

The shift also recognises the limits of culturally bounded identity claims in an era of

intense normative contestation. Civilisational language allows Indonesia to project leadership that is rooted in local values yet conversant with universal ideals. By invoking civilisation, Matta contests Western claims to universalism and reasserts it through a non-Western lens, a discursive move that strengthens Indonesia's credibility across the Global South and the Global North [23], [26].

The peacemaker role functions both as critique and as alternative to global narratives premised on coercion, intervention, and deterrence. Matta privileges diplomacy, moderation, and inclusive dialogue as the core of international leadership, drawing legitimacy from Indonesia's record in the Non-Aligned Movement and ASEAN diplomacy. The result is more than rhetorical polish. It reconfigures Indonesia's international identity in ways that cut across ideological, religious, and cultural divides [24], [28].

e. Constructing Counter-Roles and Role Differentiation

A central move in Matta's narrative is the construction of counter-roles that define Indonesia against prevailing great-power archetypes. He rejects the assertive and interventionist patterns associated with the United States, China, and Russia, and advances a leadership model grounded in moderation, ethical diplomacy, and dialogue. These counter-roles differentiate Indonesia's leadership ethos while reinforcing its moral legitimacy and civilisational distinctiveness [27], [28].

In Matta's reading, the United States faces decline rooted in coercive hegemony, ideological fatigue, and institutional overreach. China exemplifies an authoritarian capitalist paradigm that prioritises state-centric pragmatism over ethical engagement. Russia typifies revanchist nationalism and militarism [24], [26]. Set against these models, Indonesia's projected strength lies less in material capability than in moral clarity, pluralistic governance, and civilisational depth.

The contrast does more than draw rhetorical lines. It advances a normative critique of the global order. Drawing on Indonesia's legacies of non-alignment and cultural hybridity, Matta contends that influence rests in the capacity to mediate rather than dominate. Through this contrast, Indonesia can project influence without seeking hegemony, offering a "third way" in global politics [25], [30].

The counter-role strategy also contests the discursive space of global leadership. By casting Indonesia as a moderating power, Matta broadens the role repertoire available to middle and emerging states beyond the familiar types of balancers, bandwagoner, or challenger. The proposal echoes wider calls from the Global South to reconceptualise international roles in more context-sensitive and normatively grounded terms. It reimagines who may lead in a multipolar order and what leadership entails [23], [29].

f. Narrative Consistency and Ideological Continuity

Matta's account of

Indonesia as a "new superpower" is marked by consistency and ideological continuity, which strengthen its credibility and potential reach. Across nearly a decade of work, from [23] to [24] and numerous public addresses, he maintains a coherent vision that links cyclical historical analysis, civilisational identity, and normative leadership. Continuity amid shifting political conditions points to the depth of the project rather than transient messaging [25], [27].

A persistent thread is Indonesia's moral distinctiveness and historical mission. Matta reinterprets *rahmat bagi semesta* within a broader universalist frame, positioning Indonesia as the peacemaker of civilisation. The vocabulary changes, yet the values of non-violence, inclusivity, pluralism, and moral integrity remain steady. The pattern suggests a sustained strategy of civilisational renewal rather than opportunistic adaptation [28], [30].

The narrative also adapts to institutional flux. Despite Partai Gelora's failure to win parliamentary representation in 2024, Matta continues to emphasise strategic leadership over electoral competition. His influence thus extends beyond formal office and seeks to shape Indonesia's international self-conception through persistent ideational engagement. This continuity gives the narrative resilience and reach beyond the boundaries of policymaking institutions [24], [26].

Such consistency mirrors patterns among ideational leaders in emerging powers, who employ long-term visions to

consolidate domestic legitimacy and gain international recognition. Matta's sustained commitment to Indonesia's moral agency and civilisational distinctiveness consolidates a coherent and persuasive strategic narrative. It also illustrates how ideational elites can shape foreign policy orientations before formal institutionalisation, which strengthens the case for widening Foreign Policy Analysis to include enduring narrative leadership [27], [29].

4.2 Discussion

The empirical analysis traced how Anis Matta advances a civilisationally grounded and morally aspirational vision of Indonesia as a "new superpower." Building on a wide corpus of speeches, texts, and media interventions, the findings show how his strategic narratives work to reshape national role conceptions. This discussion interprets those findings through Role Theory and Strategic Narrative Theory, clarifying how narrative practices become instruments for redefining a state's identity and international purpose.

It also addresses the core analytical question: how do strategic narratives articulated by domestic political elites reshape national role conceptions in emerging powers? By engaging this question, the section highlights how ideational actors in the Global South, including those outside executive institutions, mobilise narratives to reconfigure a state's perceived identity, relational orientation, and moral mission.

The discussion proceeds in four subsections: (1) reframing role conceptions through strategic narratives, (2) narrative agency of ideational elites in the pre-policy phase, (3) the dynamics of role contestation in a discursive

multipolar order, and (4) a theoretical synthesis on narrative-led role change. Together, these components move beyond description toward theorisation by showing how narratives do not simply mirror foreign policy positions but constitute them.

a. Reframing Role Conceptions through Strategic Narratives

The case illustrates how strategic narratives reconstitute national role conceptions (NRCs) beyond conventional doctrines. Indonesia is not cast as merely adapting to structural change. It is invited to redefine its global identity, in line with reforms in Role Theory that treat role-making as creative, discursive, and strategic [12], [13]. By advancing Indonesia as a "peacemaker of civilisation," Matta shifts the country from reactive middle power to normative agent grounded in civilisational ethics and historical pluralism.

This move exemplifies what [18], [19] call the narrative constitution of roles, where actors use storytelling to enact roles rather than only describe them. Although much of this literature centres on BRICS, Matta's intervention extends the typology to Southeast Asia. Identity narratives that define who "we" are intersect with system narratives that reinterpret the global order, thereby legitimising Indonesia's claim to normative leadership in a multipolar setting. The reframing challenges prevailing hierarchies by proposing a civilisational alternative.

The dynamic echoes [16] account of discursive hegemony, where rising powers seek to transform the normative

language of order, not only redistribute capabilities. Matta's project, while less state-centric, pursues a similar ambition. His civilisational emphasis embodies what [21] terms ideational agency, that is, the capacity to shape world politics through meanings and moral vocabularies. In this vision, leadership stems from ethical authority, pluralistic governance, and cultural hybridity rather than material power.

An integrated Role Theory and Strategic Narrative lens also clarifies temporality in NRC formation. Matta invokes historical cycles and civilisational legacies through temporal emplotment, namely the strategic sequencing of past, present, and future to render leadership claims natural and plausible [15]. Situating Indonesia within a cyclical narrative of renewal frames role transformation as historically ordained, a technique common among Global South actors who leverage postcolonial experiences to reposition their states [1], [22].

The reframing is inherently relational. Indonesia's role emerges through contrast with others, including what Matta characterises as US extractive hegemony, Chinese techno-authoritarianism, and Russian militarised nationalism. This juxtaposition performs what [12] terms counter-role projection, clarifying aspirations by delineating what Indonesia is not. As [17] argues, persuasive narratives rely on internal coherence and on the capacity to unsettle the normative claims of dominant actors.

The case also broadens

how agency is conceptualised in Foreign Policy Analysis. Rather than confining agency to institutional policymakers, figures like Matta operate in a pre-policy phase where discourse anticipates policy direction [20], [21]. His narrative functions as a discursive template that may inform future articulations of foreign policy. This supports closer scholarly attention to ideational entrepreneurs who supply the symbolic resources on which states later draw, especially in unsettled orders.

Matta's narrative projects an Indonesian leadership model rooted in moral authority, civilisational synthesis, and strategic non-alignment. Treating narrative as constitutive discourse reveals how NRCs are reconfigured even when formal policy channels remain limited or indeterminate. The case foregrounds the ideational foundations of foreign policy identity formation in the Global South.

b. Narrative Agency in the Pre-Policy Phase

Matta exemplifies how ideational elites exercise narrative agency before policy crystallises. Operating outside the institutional core of foreign policy, he belongs to a widening cohort of semi-institutional, ideologically prolific, and discursively influential actors whose interventions precede formal enactment. His narratives are proactive, seeking to reshape the interpretive frames through which national identity and international roles are conceived. He thus acts as a narrative entrepreneur, injecting new role

conceptions into political imagination well in advance of institutional uptake [15], [20].

Foregrounding this pre-policy stage reveals an often-neglected arena of ideational formation in FPA. As [31], [32] show, discursive fields prefigure outcomes by setting normative baselines, defining problems, and delimiting legitimate action. Matta's sustained interventions across books, speeches, and digital media perform three functions: they rearticulate Indonesia's international identity, project a future-oriented role conception, and prepare domestic constituencies for strategic change. Even without institutionalisation, such work supplies the ideational groundwork for long-term shifts in national role conception [13], [21].

Indonesia's fragmented policymaking environment heightens this relevance. Foreign policy involves executive leaders, epistemic communities, party elites, and religious or ideological figures [33]. Matta leverages this permeability to insert alternative visions of global order into public debate. Civilisational language, anchored in Islamic moralism and aligned with Indonesia's pluralist ethos, bridges domestic identity politics and foreign policy imagination. The result is not only rhetorical performance but a coherent ideational architecture for prospective external engagement.

This pre-policy narrative activity aligns with recent efforts to widen FPA toward non-executive agency and ideational contestation, particularly in the Global South [21], [22]. Liminal

figures who straddle government and opposition, policy and ideology, demonstrate that foreign policy roles take shape through extended narrative labour rather than discrete decisions. The case underscores the formative power of narrative leadership in shaping national purpose and reimagining international identity, even without formal authority.

c. Strategic Narratives and Role Contestation

Matta's narrative unfolds within a crowded discursive arena where competing interpretations of Indonesia's international identity coexist. His vision of Indonesia as a "moral superpower" and "peacemaker of civilisation" contests long-standing NRCs associated with post-colonial modesty, non-alignment, and regional pragmatism. Established roles such as regional leader, bridge-builder, and moderate Islamic democracy continue to inform academic and policy understandings [10], [34]. Matta does not discard these identities. He reinterprets them as preparatory stages toward a more ambitious, ethically charged role.

This is role contestation in the sense developed by [12], [14], in which appropriate behaviour is negotiated across domestic and international audiences. In Matta's case, contestation operates horizontally, through elite competition within Indonesia, and vertically, across the gap between aspirational self-conceptions and systemic constraints. Domestically, his discourse challenges technocratic

or status quo preferences for incrementalism and ASEAN-centric pragmatism. Internationally, it questions hierarchies anchored in Western liberal norms and Sino-American rivalry, advancing an alternative grounded in pluralism and moral agency.

Strategic narratives are the mechanism of role innovation in this process. By fusing identity, crisis, and mission, Matta crafts a national script that mobilises consent for a reimagined global engagement. [18] shows that emerging powers use narrative to contest order and rehearse new roles. [19] likewise argues that narratives enable identity shifts before material capabilities catch up. In Matta's framing, Indonesia's moral authority, civilisational legacy, and strategic neutrality support a symbolic repositioning that precedes behavioural change. Such symbolic groundwork opens the ideational space in which new roles can be imagined, legitimised, and eventually enacted.

His contestation is refractive rather than confrontational. Rather than repudiating established identities, he hybridises them through a civilisational idiom that blends continuity with change. Non-alignment becomes geopolitical equidistance suited to a multipolar era. The Islamic-democratic synthesis is recast from domestic particularity into a global asset for intercultural mediation. This is discursive hybridisation in [16] terms, combining familiar and innovative elements to generate legitimacy across audiences.

Matta's narrative thus becomes a focal site of role contestation. It projects a civilisationally grounded leadership vision predicated on ethical authority, not material dominance, and highlights the performative nature of role change. Roles are constructed through ongoing discursive negotiation that reflects evolving identity politics at home and fluid structures abroad.

d. Theorising Narrative-Led Role Change

The case invites a broader theory of how narrative practices drive transformations in NRCs, especially in non-Western and emerging contexts. Role Theory acknowledges role change through socialisation, adaptation, or contestation [12], [14] yet under-theorises pre-institutional stages where such change begins. Integrating Strategic Narrative Theory with Role Theory addresses this gap by treating narrative as a mechanism of transformation.

Matta's approach exemplifies narrative-led role change, in which shifts in national identity are initiated discursively before they appear in policy or doctrine. This form of ideational agency accords with [21] call to analyse how power and identity are constituted through meaning, not only through capabilities or bureaucratic authority. Narratives serve as ideational prototypes that prepare the ground for role enactment once political opportunities arise. The articulation of Indonesia as a "peacemaker of civilisation" prefigures possible adjustments in diplomatic orientation, institutional alignment, and

normative leadership within multilateral venues.

Three dynamics characterise narrative-led role change. First is temporal projection of identity, the sequencing of self-conceptions across past, present, and future [7]. In Matta's account, the movement from colonial subjugation to democratic consolidation to prospective stewardship reframes prior roles as antecedents of new identities, which strengthens legitimacy. Second is audience preparation and symbolic mobilisation. Following [20], foreign policy begins with the prior contestation of ideas. Through sustained public engagement, Matta cultivates receptivity to new role possibilities among elites and mass audiences, which renders future policy shifts intelligible as fulfilment rather than rupture. Third is normative innovation. By deploying *rahmat bagi semesta* and peacemaker of civilisation, Matta proposes evaluative standards for leadership that resonate with Global South efforts to pluralise international norms [1], [22].

Theoretically, narrative-led role change augments Role Theory by foregrounding ideational entrepreneurship, temporal framing, and normative discourse. Role change can originate in sustained narrative agency, not only in external prescriptions or domestic restructuring. This widens FPA beyond executive decision-making to include the discursive work of ideational elites who operate in semi-institutional or pre-policy spaces. The case shows how strategic narratives function as engines of

role innovation. Integrating Strategic Narrative Theory with Role Theory yields a more nuanced account of how emerging powers imagine, articulate, and eventually enact new roles. The framework is especially pertinent for the Global South, where material constraints may limit hard-power options, yet narrative agency offers a potent means to envision and legitimise alternative global futures.

5. CONCLUSION

This article has examined how strategic narratives articulated by domestic political elites can reshape national role conceptions in emerging powers, focusing on the ideational leadership of Anis Matta in Indonesia. Drawing on an integrated framework that combines Role Theory and Strategic Narrative Theory, the study demonstrates that narratives are not merely post hoc rationalisations of foreign policy but constitutive mechanisms through which national identity and agency are produced. Through an empirical analysis of Matta's discourse from 2014 to 2024—including books, speeches, and media interventions—the article traced the evolution of a coherent strategic narrative that envisions Indonesia as a “peacemaker of civilisation” in a transforming world order.

The findings indicate that Matta's narrative derives its strength from three interrelated features: its strategic engagement with global disruption, its moral and civilisational framing, and its ideological continuity over time. By invoking Indonesia's historical resilience, ethical pluralism, and geopolitical equidistance, Matta constructs a counter-role that departs from conventional logics of great-power rivalry. His reframing of the post-liberal international order not as a vacuum of authority but as a moment of normative reconfiguration provides a discursive foundation for Indonesia to imagine new

forms of global responsibility and leadership.

Theoretically, the article contributes to Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) by advancing a narrative-led approach to role change. It shows that ideational elites—particularly those operating outside formal policy institutions—can act as agents of pre-policy transformation, embedding alternative role conceptions in the political imagination well before institutional uptake occurs. This reconceptualisation challenges behaviourist and institutionalist perspectives in FPA, foregrounding instead the role of discourse, meaning, and ideational entrepreneurship in the making of foreign policy identity. The framework developed here expands the analytical reach of Role Theory by linking it to the performative and temporal dynamics

of narrative construction, especially within the Global South.

More broadly, the study underscores the significance of narrative agency in international politics. It highlights the performative power of discourse in reshaping how nations understand themselves and are understood by others. As the liberal international order gives way to a more plural and contested configuration of global legitimacy, attention to the politics of storytelling becomes increasingly vital. Understanding how strategic narratives emerge, evolve, and resonate is not only key to explaining what states do, but to grasping how they imagine who they are—and what they aspire to become.

REFERENCES

- [1] A. Acharya, "After liberal hegemony: The advent of a multiplex world order," *Ethics Int. Aff.*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 271–285, 2017, doi: 10.1017/S089267941700020X.
- [2] B. Bull and D. Banik, "The Rebirth of the Global South: Geopolitics, Imageries and Developmental Realities," *Forum Dev. Stud.*, vol. 52, no. 2, pp. 195–214, 2025.
- [3] L. Freedman, "Who Wants to Be A Great Power?," *Prism*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 2–15, 2020.
- [4] A. Jong, "Multipolarization or Cosmopolitanization? Moving Towards an Indeterminate World," *Социологическое обозрение*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 147–175, 2024.
- [5] A. A. Michta, "Options for dealing with Russia and China: a US perspective," in *Russia-China Relations: Emerging Alliance or Eternal Rivals?*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022, pp. 267–276.
- [6] J. S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs, 2009. [Online]. Available: <http://www.publicaffairsbooks.com/publicaffairsbooks/cgi-bin/display?book=1586482254>
- [7] A. Miskimmon, B. O'loughlin, and L. Roselle, *Strategic narratives: Communication power and the new world order*. Routledge, 2014.
- [8] S. G. Walker, *Role theory and foreign policy analysis*. Durham: Duke University Press., 1987.
- [9] P. A. Mello and F. (Eds.). Ostermann, *Routledge handbook of foreign policy analysis methods*. London: Routledge, 2023.
- [10] K. J. Holsti, "National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy," *Int. Stud. Q.*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 233–309, 1970.
- [11] N. B. Wish, "Foreign policy makers and their national role conceptions," *Int. Stud. Q.*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 532–554, 1980.
- [12] C. Thies, *Role Theory and Foreign Policy*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies, 2017. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.291>.
- [13] M. Breuning, "Role Theory," in *Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods*, Routledge, 2022, pp. 187–201.
- [14] S. Harnisch, C. Frank, and H. W. Maull, *Role theory in international relations*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- [15] L. Roselle, A. Miskimmon, and B. O'loughlin, "Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power," *Media, war Confl.*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 70–84, 2014.
- [16] S. Krivokhizh and E. Soboleva, "Strategic narratives in China's bid for discursive hegemony," *Int. Organ. Res. J.*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 178–192, 2023.
- [17] S. Y. Zaitsev, "Political implications of the activities of TNCs: Current trends and impact on the concepts of power, legitimacy and sovereignty," *Lomonosov World Polit. J.*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 35–64, 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.48015/2076-7404-2023-15-2-35-64>.
- [18] C. Van Noort, "Study of strategic narratives: The case of BRICS," *Polit. Gov.*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 121–129, 2017.
- [19] S. Bogdanov, "Issues in the Development of the BRICS' Strategic Narrative," *Int. Organ. Res. J.*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 147–162, 2019.
- [20] V. M. Hudson, "Foreign policy analysis: Actor-specific theory and the ground of international relations," *Foreign policy Anal.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1–30, 2005.
- [21] S. Guzzini, "Ideas and Identity from Rationalism to Theories of Recognition," in *Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods*, Routledge, 2022, pp. 21–38.
- [22] S. Haug, J. Braveboy-Wagner, and G. Maihold, "The 'Global South' in the study of world politics: Examining a meta

- category," *Third World Q.*, vol. 42, no. 9, pp. 1923–1944, 2021.
- [23] A. Matta, *Gelombang Ketiga Indonesia*. Jakarta: The Future Institute, 2014.
- [24] A. Matta, *Indonesia sebagai Game Changer*. Bantul: Poestaka Rembug Kopi, 2024.
- [25] geloraTV, "Mengapa Indonesia Harus Menjadi Superpower Baru? Anis Matta Menjawab," 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugpbED02xZM>
- [26] geloraTV, "Kapan Indonesia Menjadi Superpower Baru? Anis Matta Menjawab," 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hM0VJrXJhG8>
- [27] Kompas.com, "Anis Matta, Rekonsiliasi Jokowi-Prabowo, dan Indonesia Superpower Baru," 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJgVwd3z24Y>
- [28] geloraTV, "Anis Matta: Ini 7 Alasan Indonesia Layak Menjadi Superpower Baru," 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsxzHCD2Jik>.
- [29] geloraTV, "Bisakah Indonesia Menjadi Superpower Baru? Anis Matta Menjawab," 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgrDt-vn-Ds>
- [30] Bisniscom, "Usung Semangat Superpower Baru, Partai Gelora Siap Check In di Senayan!," 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajst-B-DHNU>
- [31] I. Fairclough and N. Fairclough, *Political discourse analysis: A method for advanced students*. Routledge, 2012.
- [32] P. Schwartz-Shea and D. Yanow, *Interpretive research design: Concepts and processes*. Routledge, 2012.
- [33] R. H. McLeod and A. MacIntyre, *Indonesia: democracy and the promise of good governance*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007.
- [34] L. Suryadinata, *The Rise of China and The Chinese Overseas: A Study of Beijing's Changing Policy in Southeast Asia and Beyond*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2017.