

Toward a New Order

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For decades, world politics hasn't been worldly at all.

It has been dominated by the powers of the North Atlantic with room grudgingly given to Japan and then China. The governance structures of the United Nations Security Council, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and the membership of the G-7/G-8 reflect this as did the inner workings of the GATT/World Trade Organization.

The same holds for the honor of hosting the greatest global sporting spectacle, the Olympics. Latin America, the greatest exponents of the "beautiful game," has fared better at hosting (and winning) World Cups. Northeast Asia, though, had to wait until 2002 (38 years after the Tokyo Olympics), to host its first. The rest of Asia and all of Africa were not so lucky.

Yet, in December 2007, the world's climate change negotiators descended on Bali to negotiate the "roadmap" for next month's Copenhagen meeting.

Prior to the Bali meeting, American and European trade negotiators at the WTO were thwarted by India and Brazil. Last month, the broader G-20, with representatives from all major regions of the world, supplanted the G-7/G-8. Eleven new countries and the European Commission gained a seat at the global table.

Next year, South Africa will host Africa's first World Cup. In 2016, Brazil will host South America's first Olympics. In the process, Brazil beat out the traditional powers, the United States, Spain and Japan. When Rio de Janeiro was chosen, a tearful President Lula pronounced that "today Brazil was upgraded from a second-class to a first-class country."

For Indonesia, Brazil, India and South Africa, the expansion of world politics to all major regions on the world offers them a new global profile to celebrate their democratic and economic successes.

It should also fundamentally redefine their positions in their own regions. Traditionally, Indonesia's place in the world has been defined by its leading role in Southeast Asia, with Brazil facing a similar situation within South America, post-apartheid South Africa within Africa and India within South Asia.

These four new globally represented powers can now lift their regions' global profiles. The slogan for the 2010 World Cup is "Ke Nako" (It Is Time): Celebrate Africa's Humanity. It will not only be Brazil's or Rio's Olympics; it will be South America's. In the newly empowered G-20, India is the only representative from South Asia, South Africa the only African representative and Indonesia the only Southeast Asian. Brazil stands alongside Argentina from South America.

At the same time, this new global status will allow these countries to better spread beyond their immediate regions and neighbors' efforts to keep them so bound. India's "Look East" policy and membership in the East Asia Summit is one example as is the creation in 2003 of the leaders-level India, Brazil and South Africa forum.

Indonesia has been more modest in promoting its enhanced global position.

Unlike Brasilia, New Delhi and Pretoria, cautious Jakarta is not pushing for a permanent seat on the Security Council, nor has Jakarta bid for the Olympics or the World Cup, or turned IBSA into IBSAI.

Of the four, post-Sukarno Indonesia has tied most of its foreign policy to its regional identity and associated regional body. However, this could change with discussions in Jakarta about a "post-Asean" foreign policy, especially as Indonesian efforts to deepen Asean integration through a better funded Secretariat, a strong human rights body and a security community have met resistance.

All four governments face the exciting challenge of marrying their new global positions with their traditional regional leadership ones to maximize their own interests and minimize regional backlash.

This will require all four to allocate more resources to foreign policy to more actively represent their regions globally.

One way to do this is to use their places at the G-20 table, and their greater weight in the WTO to forge closer links with the regional groupings they lead; Asean, Mercosur, SADC and SAARC. At the same time they must define themselves and their interests beyond their traditional regions. To do this, they will need more active and skillful diplomacy and thicker hides for the barbs from their neighbors. If they can pull all this off, it will be better for them, for the regions they come from and for world politics as a whole.

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