



Normative priorities and contradictions in Indonesia's foreign policy: From Wawasan Nusantara to democracy

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the world's third largest democracy, and the largest country in Southeast Asia. We are passionate about our independence, moderation, religious freedom and tolerance. And far from being hostile, we want to create a strategic environment marked by 'a million friends and zero enemies'.

Indonesians are proud people who cherish our national unity and territorial integrity above all else. Our nationalism is all about forging harmony and unity among our many ethnic and religious groups...¹

Since the end of the Suharto regime in 1998, Indonesia has experienced a significant political transformation. Over time, the associated political reforms have moved from a procedural to a more substantive democratisation process. The electoral process, for example, now occurs by direct vote every five years. Three electoral cycles have now passed without any serious dispute or violence. By constitutional amendment the directly elected President is limited to two terms; and in 2014, for the first time in Indonesia's history, a two-term incumbent will step down and hand over the presidency to the winner of the presidential election.

In the wake of the tragedy of 9/11, Indonesia's foreign policy also confronted challenges of the 'global war on terror' waged by the United States. This campaign influenced Indonesia's interaction with the international community. As a newly emerging democratic country, Indonesia could position itself as a tolerant and moderate nation in which Islam and democracy were able to coexist. Indonesia's international stature has consequently risen due to its standing as a stable democracy with a majority Muslim population.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's speech to the Australian parliament in 2010, cited above, lists some of the main normative priorities behind Indonesia's foreign policy: democracy nationalism; independence; moderation; tolerance; and religious freedom. However, there are contradictory elements to the policy that weakens its message. To explore the implications of these contradictions, this issue brief makes three interrelated claims. The first claim, as discussed in the next section, is that Indonesia's current policy elite, for the most part continues to adhere to the narrow and nationalistic inward-looking norms inherited from the New Order regime, as represented by the Archipelagic Outlook (*Wawasan Nusantara*) and National Resilience (*Ketahanan Nasional*). The second claim, as analysed in the section that follows, is that Indonesia has undergone political transformation that allows it to present itself as a leading normative proponent of democracy, tolerance and human rights; thus linking the key normative priority of nationalism to those international norms. The third claim, the focus of the final section, is that the gap in rhetoric and action is a result of the contradiction between Indonesia's predominantly inward-looking nationalism and its evolving democracy.

NATIONALISM AND THE ARCHIPELAGIC STATE

The geography of the archipelago has played a defining role in the history of Indonesia. For one, it is the largest archipelagic state in the world. Its sheer size is magnified by its strategic location within the Asia Pacific region, which controls four of out of the seven major maritime chokepoints in the world. The rich natural resources residing within the archipelago, including oil and gas, heightens the strategic importance of Indonesia. Yet paradoxically, the size of the country and its resources also induces insecurities in Indonesian policy makers as they seek to ward off external threats and to control internal security threats to the unity of the country.²

On one hand, the vast archipelago is seen as a strong buffer that can effectively protect the country from outside threats. It also could provide the wherewithal to become a major power, particularly if its natural resources and workforce could be harnessed. On the other hand, the often contentious relationship between the central government and the regions, together with the level of ethnic, economic, and religious diversity have made the geographic scope of the archipelago the source of a vulnerable and weak Indonesia. Because of these considerations, Indonesian policy makers have been predisposed towards a land-based perspective, while practicing benign neglect of the more outward-focused maritime perspective.

¹ Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, 'Speech before the Australian Parliament', Great Hall, Parliament House, Canberra, March 10 2010, available from <http://www.presidentri.go.id/index.php/eng/pidato/2010/03/10/1353.html>

² Evan A. Laksmana, 'The Enduring Strategic Trinity: Explaining Indonesia's Geopolitical Architecture', *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, Vol.7, No.1, June 2011, pp. 95-116, available at <http://ssm.com/abstract=1979860>

This perspective has been influenced by a history of the archipelago that featured – with few exceptions such as the pre-colonial kingdoms of Sriwijaya and Majapahit – geographically limited land-based powers. The consolidation of the archipelago into the colonial Netherlands East Indies, buttressed by a focus on internal security threats, strengthened the land-based perspective that has continued mostly unabated to the present. On 28 October 1929, young Indonesian nationalists at a conference in the then Netherlands East Indies planted the seeds of nationalism and the geopolitical unification of modern Indonesia with the declaration of the Youth Pledge or *Sumpah Pemuda*. The pledge proclaimed three ideals – one motherland; one nation; and one language – that clearly demarcated the notion of an archipelagic state. Ironically, those young nationalists were, for the most part members of a small, Western-educated multilingual elite that shared a cosmopolitan outward view. That international outlook gradually withered as the new nation of Indonesia took a decidedly nationalist inward-looking turn after its declaration of independence in 1945.³

After independence, Indonesia derived its territorial claim from the Netherlands 1939 Ordinance on Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones, which had separated the archipelago into several areas. These territorial divisions and the three-mile extent of its territorial sovereignty were later perceived as making Indonesia vulnerable to foreign maritime encroachment in the archipelago. Increased smuggling and growing regional unrest were other concerns related to the extent of the archipelagic boundaries. In December 1957, in response to those concerns then Prime Minister Juanda Kartawidjaja abolished the 1939 Ordinance and declared Indonesia an ‘archipelagic state’. The archipelagic state referred to a belt of baselines (islands and water between islands) that contained the territory of the Indonesian modern state.⁴ Based on the Juanda Declaration, the new government of President Suharto’s New Order formulated the Archipelagic Outlook or *Wawasan Nusantara* in 1966.

With the formalised commitment to the *Wawasan Nusantara* concept, the New Order government campaigned for acceptance of the Archipelagic State concept in the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea and other international forums. Finally, in 1982 the archipelagic state terminology was adopted in the third United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III). Indonesia ratified the UNCLOS in 1985 through Law No. 17/1985.⁵ Within the country, citizenship and national resilience education across the country spread the concept of the archipelagic state.⁶ Despite these domestic and international developments, the spirit of the *Wawasan Nusantara* has been predominantly inward-looking, characterised by continued concerns regarding the strategic geographical location of Indonesia, a distrust towards potentially exploitive external powers wishing to take advantage of the location and Indonesian resources, and a concern for national unity in the face of separatist threats.

POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION AND INTERNATIONAL NORMS

With the post-New Order emergence of democracy, President Yudhoyono steered Indonesia’s foreign policy to an active and outward orientation based on democratic and idealistic values. In May 2005, in what he termed his first foreign policy speech since he was elected president, he defined Indonesian nationalism as ‘a brand of nationalism that is open, confident, moderate, tolerant, and outward looking’.⁷ On many other occasions the president emphasised the same themes, stressing tolerance as an important ingredient of freedom and democracy. For example, when he opened the 2011 Bali Democracy Forum, he stated, ‘we believe that freedom must be coupled with tolerance and rule of law, for without them freedom leads to unbridled hatred and anarchy’.⁸ On another occasion, at a speech given in London in 2012, the president said that Indonesia would be increasingly active in setting the norms related to overlapping territorial claims that would guide regional countries and would emphasise ‘the importance of having a set of norms and rules that could prevent violence and conflict caused by hatred and intolerance’.⁹

3 R. E. Elson, ‘Problems of Identity and Legitimacy for Indonesia’s Place in the World’, in Anthony Reid (ed.), *Indonesia Rising, the Repositioning of Asia’s Third Giant*, (ISEAS Singapore: 2012), p. 172.

4 For more details, see John G. Butcher, ‘Becoming an Archipelagic State: The Juanda Declaration of 1957 and the “Struggle” to Gain International Recognition of the Archipelagic Principle’, in Robert Cribb and Michele Ford (eds.), *Indonesia Beyond the Water’s Edge: Managing an Archipelagic State*, (ISEAS: Singapore, 2009), pp. 28–48.

5 Hasjim Djalal, ‘Regime of Archipelagic States’, Manila, Philippines, March 2011, p. 9, available at <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/files/Archive/18th/ARF%20Seminar%20on%20UNCLOS,%20Manila,%208-9Mar2011/Annex%20K%20-%20Prof%20Hasjim%20Djalal%20-%20Regime%20of%20Arch%20States.pdf>

6 Ermaya Suradinata, ‘Hukum Dasar Geopolitik dan Geostrategi dalam Kerangka Keutuhan NKRI’, (Suara Bebas: Jakarta, 2005), p. 20.

7 Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, ‘Speech before The Council on World Affairs (ICWA)’, Jakarta, 19 May 2005, available at <http://www.presidentri.go.id/index.php/pidato/2005/05/19/332.html>

8 Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, ‘Opening Statement at the Bali Democracy Forum IV’, Bali, 8 December 2011, available at <http://www.presidentri.go.id/index.php/eng/pidato/2011/12/08/1762.html>

9 Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Speech on ‘Indonesia’s Role as Regional and Global Actor’, *Wilton Park Annual Address*, 2 November 2012, available at www.presidentri.go.id/index.php/eng/pidato/2012/11/02/2001.html

In the practice of these norms, the traditionally independent and active foreign policy of Indonesia – as formulated by the first Indonesian Vice President Mohammad Hatta – has been adapted to the present globalisation period. Where Hatta used the metaphor of ‘rowing between the two reefs’ of the Eastern Communist and Western Capitalist blocs, President Yudhoyono used the metaphor of ‘navigating a turbulent ocean’. In order to achieve this, he advocated Indonesia’s adoption of a ‘constructive approach’ as an instrument with which to interact with global and regional actors. This constructivism would use Indonesia’s independence and activism as a peace maker, confidence builder, problem solver, and bridge builder.¹⁰

One of the more successful public diplomacy initiatives to emerge from this approach has been the Bali Democracy Forum (BDF). Established in 2008 as an intergovernmental forum to share experiences, lessons learned, and best practices of democracy, it has grown from 32 participating countries at its commencement to 86 countries in the sixth BDF in 2013.¹¹ Along with the growth in participant numbers, the forum’s credibility and prestige has also burgeoned. The forum has been emblematic of Indonesia’s transformation from an authoritarian past under the Suharto regime to one of the largest democracies in the world actively advocating political reform and democracy.

Globally, an important step by Indonesia was its membership in the G20 and its associated attempt to represent the voice of the developing world through that forum. Regionally, Indonesia also sought to enhance its role as one of the leaders in the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). For example, it succeeded in obtaining a consensual statement on the South China Sea dispute after the failure of the ASEAN foreign ministers’ 2012 annual meeting to issue a joint communique. Indonesia also mediated the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia over a disputed temple site.¹² It has also emerged as a major player in environmental diplomacy after successfully holding the UN Conference on Climate change in Bali in 2007. Following the conference, Indonesia pledged to reduce emissions by 26 per cent by 2020. In May 2009, Indonesia hosted the World Ocean Conference.¹³

The success of these foreign policy initiatives is interlinked with substantial advances in democracy at home. As pointed out in the introduction, Indonesia has made substantial advances in electoral democracy and peaceful transitions of government through elections. Other notable achievements have been in military reform, freedom of the press, decentralisation of the regions, and an easing of past ethnic tensions, particularly between indigenous Indonesians and ethnic Chinese Indonesians. Ethnic Chinese representatives occupying cabinet posts – deputy Governor of Jakarta, and a vice president candidate on a prospective ticket for the 2014 presidential elections – are only a few examples of the many instances of the latter. While these advances are still evolving, they have placed Indonesia as one of the more democratic countries in the region. At the same time, however, evolving democracy has provided space for hard-line political groups to vent their prejudices and ill-will, often by violent means, a contradiction examined in the next section.¹⁴

10 Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, ‘Speech before The Council on World Affairs (ICWA)’, Jakarta, 19 May 2005 available at <http://www.presidentri.go.id/index.php/pidato/2005/05/19/332.html>

11 ‘Participants praise Indonesia for Bali Democracy Forum’, *The Jakarta Post*, November 9 2013, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/11/09/participants-praise-indonesia-bali-democracy-forum.html>

12 Michael Vatikiotis, ‘Indonesia’s Quiet Diplomacy’, August 10 2012, available at <http://michaelvatiotiis.com/?p=180>

13 ‘Indonesian President makes speech at CIFOR on sustainable growth with equity’, Center for International Forestry Research, 13 June 2012, pp. 4-5 available at <http://blog.cifor.org/9657/Indonesian-president-makes-speech-at-cifor-on-sustainable-growth-with-equity/#.UM8wL9iJ9KC>

14 Colin Brown, ‘Democratisation in Indonesia’, presented to the Australian Institute of International Affairs, Brisbane, 23 October 2012.

CONTRADICTIONS IN NORMATIVE PRIORITIES

The Yudhoyono administration has been adept in combining action and rhetoric in the pursuit of foreign policy based on democratic normative priorities. However, it has been less successful in bridging the gap between foreign policy and the domestic policies that affect the democratic environment within the country. The image of tolerance, burnished by President Yudhoyono, has increasingly been viewed as paradoxical with the reality of Indonesian domestic dynamics. In particular, that image is in conflict with the trend of religious intolerance in Indonesia.

While the Indonesian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and freedom to worship, the government officially recognises only Islam, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. However, it is not only congregations of unrecognised religions, or indeed, the minority official religions such as Christians, that face the possibility of discrimination. Increasingly, minority Muslim sects considered deviant, such as Ahmadiyya and Shiite Muslims, have also suffered from discrimination and violence.¹⁵ Government officials have often been indifferent to such acts or have responded with discriminatory state legislation that encourages further attacks. For example, in 2008 the government, through a joint decree of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Interior Ministry, and the Attorney General, barred Ahmadiyya Muslims from proselytising. Some local governments then issued legislation ranging from closing Ahmadiyya mosques, banning the building of Ahmadiyya religious facilities, to the banning of Ahmadiyya believers in the local area.¹⁶

A part of the reluctance to stand firm against small hard-line Muslim groups has been attributed to the nationalistic sentiment associated with the Archipelagic Outlook. According to Wiryono, former Indonesian ambassador to Australia, the reluctance of the majority Indonesian Muslim moderates to speak out is due to fear that they would be accused of siding with the West in its war against Islam. In the same way, the government is also reluctant to take action against hard-line Islamists, as it would appear it is dictated to by Western powers urging control of the hardliners.¹⁷ However, for the most part it is the radical groups, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam or FPI), who have been effective in using the democratic environment to their advantage.¹⁸

The post-New Order democratic environment has also had an impact on government political decisions previously hostage to the inward-looking nationalism and *Wawasan Nusantara*. A primary example of this was the Aceh peace process and the resulting Aceh peace agreement in 2005, which ended the almost 30-year-long conflict between the central government and the Aceh separatist movement. The Aceh peace accord was a product of the first Yudhoyono administration. At the end of its second and final term, the Yudhoyono government has struggled to deal with the dynamics of domestic politics and the Papua separatist movement. As in the case of Aceh, the frequently repressive actions justified in the name of 'national unity and territorial integrity' paradoxically create momentum for the separatist movement to grow.¹⁹

CONCLUSION: THE LIMITS OF SOFT POWER

The presentation of the World Statesman Award for promoting religious freedom to President Yudhoyono provides a good illustration of both the advantages and limits of soft power. The Appeal of Conscience Foundation, a US-based interfaith group founded by Rabbi Arthur Schneier presented the award to the President in May 2013. The award sparked furore among human rights groups abroad and in Indonesia, protesting the award as undeserved given the spread of religious intolerance in Indonesia under Yudhoyono's watch. Yet it gave the President yet another platform to claim: that despite problems with intolerance, the country was an example of moderation, saying that 'Indonesia is an example to the world that democracy, Islam, and modernity can live in positive symbiosis'.²⁰

The domestic protests were such that the Indonesian Ambassador to the United States Dino Patti Djalal felt compelled to respond. While acknowledging limitations and flaws, he cited the President's record for increasing the global status of Indonesia as a stable democracy, improving on the record of human rights of previous Indonesian governments, ensuring effective peacekeeping diplomacy, and making Indonesia a global player in such areas as the G-20 Forum, climate change, environment and ocean conservation, and inter-faith activities. He did not discount the weaknesses that needed to be addressed, including corruption, poverty, and social conflict.²¹

15 'Indonesia' Report, Freedom House, (2013), available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2013/indonesia>

16 Rafendi Djamin, 'The Paradox of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Indonesia', available at www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Expression/ICCPR/Bangkok/RafendiDjamin.pdf

17 S. Wiryono, 'An Indonesian View: Indonesia, Australia and the Region', in ed. John Monfries, *Different Societies, Shared Futures, Indonesia Update Series*, (Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, the Australian National University, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore: 2006), p. 17

18 Colin Brown, Op. cit. p. 4

19 Yanto Sugiarto, 'The Papua Problem: Seeds of Disintegration', *The Jakarta Globe*, August 18 2011, available at <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/archive/the-papua-problem-seeds-of-disintegration/>

20 Sara Schonhardt, 'Is Indonesia still a model of religious tolerance?', (*Christian Science Monitor*, May 31 2013).

21 Dino Djalal, 'Dino: The World Statesman Award for President SBY Not Surprising', 20 May 2013, available at <http://www.setkab.gi.ud/artikel-8713-seputar-pemberian-world-statesman-award-kepada-sby.html>

As a contestant in the convention established to select the presidential candidate from the Democratic Party, Dino Patti Djalal represents a new generation hopeful of taking over national leadership from the New Order generation. The outcome of the presidential election is, of course, difficult to predict. Nevertheless, whatever generation the new president represents, he or she will have the choice of foreign policy featuring the democratic norms espoused by the past administration or reverting to a nationalistic strain in line with *Wawasan Nusantara*. Domestically the new government also may choose to concentrate on issues of domestic security threats, as in the case of separatist threats in Papua, or instead emphasise policy means of resolving religious intolerance. It could cater to the narrow minority brand of intolerance and extreme nationalism in Indonesian society or strengthen democratic institutions capable of supporting the majority proponents of moderate and tolerant nationalism.

The extent of Indonesia's ascent will depend on narrowing the gap between rhetoric and action, particularly on its domestic front. Without that narrowing, and with only geographic size, a large population, and an abundance of natural resources to justify its standing as a regional power, the normative priority of tolerant democracy supporting an active foreign policy would be seen to be Indonesia's version of the 'emperor's new clothes'. Foreign policy does indeed begin at home.

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