Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies



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## Asia-Pacific Responses to U.S. Security Policies

# Reluctant Partner:
## Indonesia's Response to U.S. Security Policies

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## Executive Summary


- Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Indonesia — and Southeast Asia more generally — has featured more prominently for Washington. The terrorist attack in Bali, on October 12, 2002, serves to confirm that the problem of terrorism has become serious within Indonesia. Unfortunately, just as Washington's interest in Indonesia increases, U.S.-Indonesia relations grow more difficult, fuelled by negative perceptions within Indonesia of U.S. foreign policy.
- While the Indonesian government has become more cooperative with the United States in the war against terrorism, the Indonesian population is not generally supportive. These differences are also found in the political elite. Indonesia's vice president and several cabinet ministers have taken a more negative attitude towards U.S. foreign policy than President Megawati and the majority of the executive.
- Intra-cabinet dissent and public opposition constrain President Megawati's support of U.S. policy. The upshot of this is that the Megawati government has been unwilling to go further in supporting U.S. policy, most notably refusing to back the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan, or possible action in Iraq. Given the proximity of the Soeharto government to the United States (at best a marriage of convenience for both partners), post-reform Indonesia has resumed, to some degree, the early independence *bebas aktif* (free and active) policy, resulting in a greater degree of distance from the United States. On many important current issues Indonesia is a critic of U.S. policy, including Iraq and preemption.
- Jakarta's main objection to U.S. policy is that Washington will classify groups as "terrorist" only if they directly threaten U.S. interests. The Indonesian government, after September 11, has maintained that al Qaeda is worthy of condemnation, yet officials perceive Washington's refusal to list separatists in Aceh as terrorists as a double standard in U.S. foreign policy.
- At present, Indonesia is quietly content with the general U.S. presence in the Asia/Pacific region. Rhetoric about global disarmament and a more equitable international order aside, and despite a vocal section of the Indonesian public that is distrustful of U.S. intentions, the government of Indonesia fundamentally sees the United States as a benign power, and a restraining hand on powers situated to the north.


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## INTRODUCTION

U.S. interests in Indonesia have altered since the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), given Indonesia's status within the Muslim world and the Bali blast in October 2002 — the latter marking the clear emergence of a terrorist problem, related to Islamist terror groups within Indonesia. Previously, Indonesia was an important partner in containing communism during the cold war. Today, apart from terrorism concerns, Indonesia has remained important as it sits aside critical sea-lanes, and its fate will have a dramatic impact on the resilience of Southeast Asia as a whole.

In the last decade or so the U.S.-Indonesia relationship, while largely cordial, has experienced some serious fluctuations, and this forms an important backdrop to the current issues. Due to human rights concerns in East Timor, military-to-military relations were completely cut in 1991, partially restored afterwards, and severed again during the 1999 violence in East Timor. The eventual loss of the territory of East Timor in 1999 was a national trauma — principally blamed on Australia and the United States — from which the Indonesian populace has yet to recover. Nationalist concerns of western interference have converged, to some extent, with co-religionist fears about the nature of the U.S. war against terrorism. Many Indonesians fear that the war on terrorism is a pretext to weaken Islam. While President Megawati condemned the September 11 terror attacks against the United States, her government refused to support the counterattack in Afghanistan. There is general opposition by her government to U.S. policy in the GWOT and the Middle East (including Iraq), yet this must be tempered with the obvious point that America is still largely regarded as a benign military presence in the wider Asia-Pacific region — especially vis-à-vis the power rivalries in Northeast Asia. Indonesian officials seem unfazed by talk of an emerging U.S. policy of preemption. This is recognized as a rhetorical tool rather than a dramatic challenge to international rules and norms.

Assessing Indonesian foreign policy is not always an easy task given the paucity of primary source information and the Indonesian government's current lack of interest in broader global trends as Indonesia continues to concentrate on domestic vulnerabilities and regional issues. However, the public record, supplemented by statements by ministers of the Republic, gives a general sense of Indonesia's responses to U.S. foreign policy. The commentary below is largely based on media reports and discussion with Indonesian officials. Primary source documents, where available, also form part of this analysis.

## INCREASED U.S. INTEREST/COMMITMENT

Although Southeast Asia has often taken a back seat in U.S. policy making circles, which tend to concentrate on events in Northeast and South Asia, Indonesia's stability has always been seen as the key to a regional resilience in Southeast Asia. Clearly the terrorist attacks on the U.S. mainland on September 11, 2001, have added a new dimension to the U.S.-Indonesia relationship. Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country and member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), has an important role to play in shaping Muslim opinion. The Bali blast in October 2002, in which 200 tourists — mostly Australian — were killed, also dramatically demonstrates that Indonesia, and Southeast Asia more widely, is threatened by the presence of terrorist cells linked to the al Qaeda network. Yet even prior to the Bali blast, fears of terrorist infiltration into Southeast Asia — especially the maritime countries of the region — had given rise to revived military-to-military contact with the region. While U.S. troops were stationed in

the Southern Philippines as advisors in the war against Abu Sayyaf and as builders of infrastructure, the Bush administration pushed forward plans to restore some level of military-to-military relationship with Indonesia. Western media characterizations of Southeast Asia as the potential "second front" caused some alarm with the pundits in Indonesia in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

## GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM (GWOT)

Surveys confirm that the Indonesian public actually opposes America's war on global terrorism. (See Pew Global Attitudes Projects, "What the World Thinks in 2002," December 4, 2002 — this report shows that two-thirds are opposed to the U.S. response.) But since the Bali blast in 2002 it is evident that Indonesia has been targeted by al Qaeda linked terrorists. Despite a surprising level of reluctance to accept the nature of this problem internationally, there is some evidence that the Indonesian public may now be more persuaded about the existence of terrorist cells within Indonesia.

Although most Indonesians were as horrified by the September 11 attacks, there has been hesitation to support U.S. attempts to deal with the problem on the international level. Many reportedly have trouble accepting that Osama bin Laden is guilty of the attack. Furthermore, a predominant view within Indonesia — home to a famously moderate version of the Islamic faith — is that the United States may use the GWOT as a pretext to flex its muscles in the Muslim world. Other issues raised by the political elite include objections to the use of military force in Afghanistan instead of an international court, and that the U.S. counterattack did not address the key root causes that continue to motivate Islamist terrorists (cited as poverty and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). Immediately after the attacks, Indonesia's Vice President Hamzah Haz blamed the attack on America's "sins." He, and others in the political elite, refused to acknowledge that radical groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Laskar Jihad (LJ) might be a threat to Indonesian security despite their record of violence. President Megawati therefore found herself in a situation where her government was unable to act decisively against radical suspects for fear of being broadsided by her opponents making political capital out of her secular background.

America's counterattack after September 11 revealed a disconnect between the United States and Indonesia. In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President Megawati undertook an already scheduled visit to Washington. The Bush administration was keen to receive the leader of the largest Muslim nation, not least of all for the symbolic message it delivered. Megawati roundly condemned the acts of terrorism against the United States, but once she had returned to Indonesia, found it politic to condemn equally the anticipated counterattack against Afghanistan. Megawati, whose political position is somewhat delicate, has had to be careful not to be seen as a mere U.S. puppet.

The Megawati government, the wider Indonesian political elite, and the general masses, while questioning whether al Qaeda was responsible for the September 11 attacks, held the view that bin Laden should be given a fair hearing at an international court and that the stand-off with Afghanistan should be resolved through negotiation rather than an armed intervention. Anticipation of the U.S. war in Afghanistan sparked a series of fierce demonstrations throughout Jakarta, which at times involved actual or implied physical threats to the U.S. Embassy. The debate over the U.S. counterattack against Afghanistan cooled when television images of the Northern Alliance liberating Afghanistan on the ground and Afghans celebrating the end of the Taliban's Deobani-style government were broadcast throughout Indonesia (and the rest of the world).

On the domestic front, in the aftermath of the Bali bombing, the Indonesian government has been able to convince a hitherto skeptical parliament about the need for anti-terrorist legislation (although there is the broader point that tighter laws were not exactly needed to arrest prominent LJ members). The Indonesian government has now arrested more than 40 individuals connected with the Bali blast, an effort described by the U.S. Ambassador as evidence of Indonesian cooperation on the issue, including the ongoing Indonesian-U.S. Security Dialogue.

While there is now a greater will to act against "international terrorism" (read: Islamist terrorist groups linked to al Qaeda) inside Indonesia itself, there is still a mismatch between Washington and Jakarta about definitions of what constitutes terrorism. It is obvious that Jakarta would dearly have liked to see the separatist Free Aceh Movement make the State Department's list of international terrorist groups. Washington's steadfast refusal to do this demonstrates that the Bush administration views the struggle in Aceh as being the product of local conditions. It would not augur well if Jakarta used "anti-terrorism" as the pretext for a new round of indiscriminate military operations that might ruin a very fragile peace deal. Washington would also risk alienating a population that is not linked to the al Qaeda "jihad" against western interests. Jakarta's main objection relates precisely to this point — that the United States will only classify a group as "terrorist" if it directly threatens U.S. interests. The Indonesian government continues to maintain that while al Qaeda is worthy of condemnation, there is a double standard in the U.S. policy — one that Indonesia cannot whole heartedly support.

## PRE-EMPTION AND INTERVENTIONISM

Responding to Jakarta's deep concern over support for the unity of the Republic of Indonesia, the United States has reaffirmed its support for Indonesian territorial integrity on numerous occasions. Fears linger in Indonesia, following the departure of East Timor from the Indonesian fold under enormous international (including the United States) pressure, that humanitarian crises elsewhere in the archipelago could result in unwanted intervention from outside powers. In light of this Indonesia is opposed to interference in its affairs, and officials have expressed concern over reports that the United States reserves the right of preemption. That said, the Indonesian government itself does not appear to be alarmed by any potential incursion from U.S. forces. When Australian Prime Minister John Howard announced in the wake of the Bali bombing that Australia would adopt the right to strike outside its territory to defend Australia, both the Indonesian Vice President, Hamzah Haz and Foreign Minister Nur Hassan Wirajuda stated in a press conference in early December 2002 that Australia's "plan to attack neighboring countries" was rhetoric — albeit somewhat alarmist. This reaction to Howard's statement, which was most likely made with Indonesia directly in mind, is indicative that Indonesia probably reads the Bush administration's more general preemption doctrine in the same light — in addition it is a doctrine more focused on central Asia (Afghanistan) and the Middle East (Iraq), and now, perhaps, North Korea.

Indonesia has been a long-term critic of the manner in which the United States and its allies have handled Iraq. Indonesia has opposed sanctions for more than a decade now, arguing that sanctions have not worked and have a largely adverse affect on the people they are supposed to help. The plans for war against Iraq have drawn more criticism, both from the government and the Indonesian people, who are overwhelmingly against any attempt to invade Iraq. In December 2002, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Indonesia's

Coordinating Minister for Security and widely respected moderate within the Megawati government, urged that a peaceful solution be found for the Iraq crisis. He warned that the public counter reaction to an invasion, both in Indonesia and throughout the world, could be severe. Bambang, reiterating the official Indonesian position, advised the United States to act only in accordance with the direction of the United Nations. A unilateral action by the United States would be regarded with alarm in Jakarta, and harsh criticism would certainly emanate from the Megawati government. Why would approval for any future action from the UN make the difference? A course of action undertaken by a broad cross section of the international community would be more palatable to the Indonesian public. A unilateral action would be simply impossible to support.

There is a wider context for all of this. U.S. policy in the Middle East has been a sore point in Indonesian politics. Western involvement in the Middle East has not been viewed as a benign presence in influential quarters of Indonesian opinion. In particular, the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the source for anti-Americanism within Indonesia. Even the moderate Abdurrahman Wahid, while president, attempted to use his office to mediate the conflict and create a Palestinian state. Although the official U.S. government position favors the creation of a Palestinian state, Indonesians would still view the United States as pro-Israel in the final analysis. Officially, the Government of Indonesia does not recognize Israel and has condemned U.S. foreign policy with regards to that state since its inception.

## UNILATERALISM/MULTILATERALISM

As noted above, Indonesia has urged the United States to consider multilateral channels over and above unilateral actions — notably in reference to the crisis in Iraq. Indonesia has made it clear that actions that receive the UN stamp of approval are to be considered more legitimate. Indonesia's impression that the Bush administration is more unilateralist than its predecessor administration has led to Indonesian officials expressing their concern. Yet, as argued above, this is not necessarily because Indonesia itself fears preemptive attack by the United States (nobody sees the United States posing a threat to Indonesian sovereignty) but because of the way in which U.S. global actions will play out with the wider masses — whose power, when exercised, still causes considerable angst for Jakarta's political elite.

## MILITARY-TO-MILITARY ENGAGEMENT

Military-to-military relations between the United States and Indonesia have been problematic since the Díli massacre in 1991, when Indonesian troops opened fire and killed more than 200 demonstrators during a protest rally. U.S. military assistance was cut as a protest against the military's flagrant abuse of human rights. Having been only partially restored in the subsequent years, the military-to-military relationship was again severed over the violence in East Timor in 1999. U.S. State Department and Defense officials have, subsequently, made the restoration of the military relationship dependent on the following: (a) peaceful resolution of the East Timor situation, including trials for key Indonesian military officers implicated in the 1999 violence; (b) prosecution of the militia elements responsible for the death of three UN workers at Atambua (one a U.S. citizen) in 2000; and (c) greater respect for human rights in the outer provinces, especially the simmering conflict of Aceh.

The Bush administration had already decided to revisit the severed military relationship even prior to the altered strategic environment post-September 11 on the grounds that isolation of the Indonesian military was unlikely to have the desired effect of moving this body towards greater professionalism. September 11 gave greater impetus to begin a series of steps to restore the relationship, albeit in a slow and cautious manner. The Bush administration has asked Congress to approve an IMET (International Military Education and Training) program, while non-lethal military sales have resumed. In August 2002, during a state visit to Indonesia, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell announced a U.S.$50 million assistance package, half of which is to be channeled to the Indonesian police. The U.S. sees assistance to the Indonesian police as essential to addressing the rundown of the state's capacity to enforce law and order — which is essential to eliminating a fertile ground for radical terrorist groups. Even a small number of dedicated cadre, whose actions were unchecked leading up to the Bali blast, have been able to cause havoc.

## U.S. FORWARD PRESENCE

Indonesia's importance to the concept of an East Asian littoral, raised in the 2001 U.S. Quarterly Defense Review (QDR), is obvious from its geographical spread and location. Passage through Indonesia's waters allows access between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The Indonesian position on the U.S. military presence in the Pacific Rim is basically supportive but not without a degree of ambivalence. While Indonesia is often described as a U.S. "ally" during the Soeharto era, Indonesia remained rhetorically committed to a policy of non-alignment (defined as a policy of equidistance from both superpowers during the cold war). Indonesia, for reasons of pragmatism, has supported the stabilizing influence of the United States on the Pacific Rim, yet made it clear that extra-regional players in Southeast Asia were to be discouraged in the long term (long-standing criticisms of the Five Power Defence Arrangements, which tie Singapore and Malaysia into an alliance with Australia, New Zealand and the UK, are a case in point). Indonesia is widely regarded as having pretensions of regional leadership and global influence, but has never managed to achieve significant state capacity to realize these desires. The reconfiguration of the U.S. Forward Presence, characterized by the phrase "places not bases," (a phrase first employed during the winding down of the U.S. bases in the Philippines), does not impact on this view of a U.S. presence in the region. In spite of the absence of permanent bases, the U.S. naval presence in Southeast Asia is still quite formidable, with about 300 port visits a year, regular exercises, and other cooperative arrangements. The stationing of troops in the Southern Philippines did not draw a negative response from the Indonesian government, with the matter being viewed as the domestic concern of the government of the Philippines.

Throughout the cold war, Soeharto's Indonesia found common cause with the United States in the containment of communism, and U.S. military projection is still viewed as a relatively benign factor in the Asia-Pacific region. Concern about the exercise of western power, expressed by important sectors of the political elite, and often directed at Australia rather than the United States, centers around possible attempts to split up Indonesia. Yet the challenge is not seen as a military threat, but one of "soft power" influences from non-governmental organization (NGO) groups in the West (in some more far fetched scenarios, with the assistance of various western governments). In this light, Indonesia's prime security concern revolves around the separatist movements in Aceh and Papua, with communal violence in Ambon having the potential for international interference. Indonesia will continue to seek assurance that the United States respects the sovereign territory of the Republic of Indonesia.

## NONPROLIFERATION/WMD

A consistent theme in Indonesia's foreign relations since the Soeharto era has been advocacy for reductions of both vertical and horizontal WMD proliferation. Within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Indonesia was a successful advocate for the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ) to supplement the earlier Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), which urged ASEAN members and extra-regional powers to limit great power competition in Southeast Asia. Nuclear weapons tests in India and Pakistan drew immediate, but quite short-lived criticism from ASEAN. While Indonesia recognizes the goals of limiting WMD proliferation, including the cases of Iraq and North Korea, rhetorically Indonesia has tended to follow this up with wider calls for a more "just" world order. This involves WMD disarmament of the P-5 (5 Permanent Members of the UN Security Council), as well as a revamp of the composition of the Security Council (preferably with Indonesia picking up a permanent seat).

## INTEGRATION DOCTRINE

Indonesia's dramatic shift towards democratization after May 1998 (with the departure of Soeharto) has been supported by successive U.S. administrations. Under the Clinton administration, Indonesia was listed by the State Department as one of four countries considered to be critical cases for democratic development (the others being scattered throughout the developing world). While the process of democratization in Indonesia has been largely domestically driven, U.S. policy has been to continue to nudge Indonesia in the "right" direction. U.S. Ambassador to Jakarta, Ralph Boyce, has publicly declared improvements in the human rights situation in Aceh as a step that can be taken in improving liberal democracy. Military-to-military relations have been held up in part because of this particular problem. Backsliding from the current democratic (or semi-democratic) arrangements would have negative consequences for Indonesia and make it more problematic to receive foreign aid from the international community. It is understood that a military coup, for example, would not sit well with Washington — in direct contrast to a number of military coups in Southeast Asia during the cold war. In this sense, the maintenance of democratic norms is necessary for the health of the relationship. America's pressure for liberal democracy (however subtle in this case) has not always been well received. Some members of the political and military elite complain that Washington puts pressure on Indonesia to simultaneously respect human rights while at the same time disrespecting the rights of suspected terrorist operatives in the aftermath of September 11.

## SUMMARY

While Indonesia and the United States remain important to each other in a number of ways, it is the war on terrorism that has come to dominate the relationship — especially from the point of view of Washington. This has two distinct dimensions. First, the United States has sought Indonesia's support for its global counter offensive against terrorism, yet the Indonesian government, with overwhelming support from its public, refuses to countenance this action beyond condemning the September 11 terrorist attacks. The second factor involves the threat that terrorist groups pose to Indonesia itself. Since

the Bali blast, there has been much more cooperation and common ground between Indonesia and the United States.

While Indonesia views the U.S. presence in the Pacific as benign, and a useful check on power rivalries to the northeast, it is unrealistic to expect that the Indonesian government will be able to publicly support U.S. policy in the wider world — especially in the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq. Indonesia has demanded that multilateral solutions be found in these cases, and preferably a negotiated settlement to the problem. In the emerging crisis with Iraq, Indonesia has clearly stated that it will only support attempts to remove Iraq's WMD if done through the United Nations. The sheen of UN support would provide, for Indonesia, is an easier way to sell the U.S. action to the extremely skeptical Indonesian public.

The United States will need to live with these differences of opinion while continuing to bolster Indonesia's cohesion. While reestablishing military-to-military relations (within the tram lines set by the U.S. Congress) is seen in Washington as a means to shore up security, in Indonesia the removal of what they view as "partial sanctions" would have important practical and symbolic implications.

In the final analysis, Indonesia remains a critic of aspects of U.S. foreign policy. The relationship between Indonesia and the United States has had its difficulties, but there has been enough of a convergence of interests to ensure that the two countries remain partners — partners who sometimes cannot look each other in the eye, but partners nonetheless.



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