



## Indonesia's New Foreign Policy- 'Thousand friends-zero enemy'

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### **Summary**

As Indonesia celebrated its 65th independence day on August 17th, it is also trying to reorient its foreign policy goals to emerge as a responsible power in the Southeast Asian region. The two continuous terms of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono have given a new direction to Indonesia's foreign policy. Soekarno and Soeharto, the iconic leaders of Indonesia, had pursued contrasting approaches and power affiliations in every possible way. Soekarno was keen on emerging as the undisputed leader of NAM. Soeharto formatted his foreign policy by toeing the US line to a large extent. Today, the clear trends are that Indonesia's foreign policy is a unique amalgamation of the two schools of thought and policy of adaptation to changing geopolitical and geostrategic compulsions. Indonesia being the world's largest archipelago with the biggest Muslim population is again trying to gain the leadership position in the region through constructive and cooperative gestures and balanced bargaining between major powers.

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Indonesia's contemporary foreign policy slogan is '*a thousand friends- zero enemy*' for the best of national interest, which was projected by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in a statement released in January 2010. It clearly articulated that it would improve relations with every nation through bilateral ties and multilateral institutions. It also aspires to promote justice and order in the international arena, better investment policy for economic development, democracy and consolidation in regional integration, protecting Indonesian nationals particularly migrant workers, maintaining national unity, and striving for a more effective foreign policy mechanism. This slogan and the strategy that goes with it is a post-1998 crisis evolution. The process to reach there is difficult. Any nation would face serious problems when the rule maintained for more than three decades were to be suddenly transferred.

In terms of national unity, Indonesia is again facing a grave challenge similar to the problem in 1960s. There is worsening communal conflicts in Ambon, Maluku, and Poso and rehabilitation in Aceh (conflict though resolved after Helsinki accord in 2005) and intensification of unrest in Papua. Australia had been keen in the past to support Timor and Papuan causes in the name of human rights. US views were in consonance with Australia's, with the US lobbying to extend support for awarding the Noble Peace Prize to Jose Ramos Horta, the current president of East Timor. Bill Clinton, the then US president, imposed an arms embargo owing to human rights abuses in East Timor in 1999. Australia gave political asylum to Papuan refugees in 2006. Through UNTAET, Australian troops play a major role when compared with the roles played by troops from other countries including Thailand. B. J. Habibie (the then Indonesian president) was wrong to believe that many would choose unity with Indonesia, which was why he decided to offer to hold a referendum in East Timor. Later, Habibie lost his chance to be presidential

candidate because of what happened with East Timor. Many people regard him only as an extension of old status quo from Soeharto. His successor, President Abdurrahman Wahid also called Gus Dur, worked hard in spite of his ailing condition. He traveled abroad to seek help in recovering from economic crisis and domestic problems. And those who succeeded him as president like Megawati Sukarnoputri tried to resolve other issues like Aceh.

With the signing of the Helsinki MoU in 2005, the parameters for granting Aceh special autonomy within the republic were adopted. Megawati Soekarnoputri, the fifth president, was effectively able to restore peace internally with an iron fist. Because of her strong conviction, many began to refer to her as '*Soehartoputri*.' Indians used to call her 'Goddess Durga.' Moreover, the 2004 Tsunami was a huge blow for the separatists. The next president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, also called as SBY, asked for and accepted help from India, US, and others for post-Tsunami relief.

The most challenging problem having serious ramifications on foreign policy was Papua separatism. There was no revival of armed conflict as there are factions of Papuan OPM (Organisasi Papua Merdeka) rebel group pursuing diplomatic way by approaching Australia and the US. Megawati first opposed George W. Bush's GWOT policy in a secret meeting in Bali. She was reluctant to support anti-terror initiatives recognizing that the public perception was anti-American and pro-Middle East. Nevertheless, after Bali bombing, this policy changed. Beginning with her presidency, there was improving institutional and information & intelligence sharing for combating terrorism. Under the leadership of the reelected SBY, Indonesian foreign minister Marti Natalegawa's strategy would be to welcome the US again while at the same time maintaining a cautious distance and enhancing relations with other powers. Indonesia experienced difficulties when US embargoed its products. If US really wants Indonesia to be its sheriff in ASEAN region, then Indonesia would bargain for much including asking for US commitment not to middle with West Papua separatism. The same applies to Australia as well.

### *Bebas dan Aktif policy*

The Soekarno leadership was a populist regime, which was keen on seeking international support from anywhere including India, China, US, and Soviet Union. At the same time the regime also supported Afro-Asian nations and the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) under the principle of 'free and active' (*bebas dan aktif*) policy. The orientation of policy encompasses national, regional, as well as international. As a new modern nation state, it learn to be assertive, meaning critical, in international forum against the domination of US, British and Western nation in the United Nations. It cut connections with the former colonial master in terms of language, bilateral relations and other post-colonial structure. The policy was idealistic as well as pragmatic. Soekarno was well supported by skilled diplomats like Sutan Syahrir, H Roeslan Abdulgani, Mohammad Hatta and advice from Tan Malaka.

With regard to international politics, contemporary foreign policy is similar to that of Soekarno's with some adaptation from Soeharto's outlines. Contemporary Indonesia supports a world free of nuclear weapons and complete disarmament with regard to North Korean and Iran issues. It has committed to play an active role as coordinator of the NAM on the disarmament issue in the NPT review conference in New York in May 2010. Different from Soekarno's option of abandoning UN, SBY has been supporting UN's greater role in handling the global economic crisis. This year, Indonesia hosted leaders meeting to review progress of the Millennium Development Goals. Indonesia, nevertheless, continues to adhere to Soekarno's idealism for global justice and order through active participation in democratization of global institutions including structural reforms in Security Council. With regard to emerging VISTA (a group of second tier emerging economies comprising of Vietnam, Indonesia, South Africa, Turkey and Argentina), Indonesia is trying to carve a niche within the Group 20. The domestic aspiration of the Muslim majority again reflected in support for the Palestinian cause and support for the Quartet diplomacy. Indonesia is the only country which abstained during voting in Security Council sanctions on Iran. It clarified its stance of willingness to contribute in its capacity and to the need of troubled countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

### ASEAN as priority

In contrast to Soekarno's regime, Soeharto's was reserved. Pursuing a low profile foreign policy, it fostered better relations with neighboring countries through ASEAN. Earlier, ASEAN had offered India membership but India refused. Decades later, this regionalism has proved successful in terms of its objective of stabilizing regional security and fostering economic development. Earlier, there was a constant low intensity of conflict within the region. It is important to note that after ASEAN was formed, no armed conflict has happened among the ASEAN five. The level of Human Development Index (HDI) is relatively moderate. Soeharto enjoyed military support and US support. His regime snapped bilateral relations with China so as to maintain better relations with the US and to contain communism. Domestically, it successfully secured cohesion between army and Soeharto above all. In doing so, it isolated Soekarno and Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) against support from external powers. During his long rule, there were only a few prominent diplomats including Adam Malik and Kusumatmaja.

Marty Natalegawa, Indonesian foreign minister, has been bestowed with the duty of prioritising the ASEAN region in the new foreign policy orientation. The formation and strengthening of East Asian Community shall be ASEAN's priority. Every multilateral institution be it ASEAN +3, ARF, APEC, and East Asia Summit will be in that framework. By this statement it considers to accept Japan, China, and Korea into existing ASEAN framework. Before doing so, the unity of the existing member should be fostered first.

In pursuing the recent framework, Indonesia is striving to rediscover relations with

Singapore and Malaysia after initial differences on extradition issues, demarcation and worker issues in recent years. The concern at present is unresolved conflict between Thailand-Cambodia, and between Philippines-Vietnam over islands in the South China Sea. Myanmar will again serve as a tough question in the near future after Indonesia's new commitment to reflect democracy into foreign policy. Indonesia's answer is to promote democracy in the region with the consent of the respective country. This commitment is under challenge given the recent political turmoil in Thailand.

It will take another five years for ASEAN to evolve into an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. Only after that could the further enlargement process start. Japan would be the first to be accepted, then Korea and China. This enlargement will be far away in the future. There are also chances of Australia and India being considered for membership in the community. But Indonesia is unlikely to support other initiatives being mooted, like for instance the proposal made by former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to establish an Asia Pacific community. The AEC is still based on consensus. The principle for respecting each member's sovereignty is unlikely to change. ASEAN would not evolve into another European Union. Indonesia wants an ASEAN community which shall be democratic and has good governance. Indonesia has shown assertiveness by agreeing to chair ASEAN again in 2011 By taking over from Brunei Darussalam.

### Improving relations through bilateral engagement and multilateral institutions

Previously, Indonesia's relation with EU was only through ASEAN channel. Today, the relationship has improved through normalization of ties with the Netherlands (erstwhile colonial master of Indonesia) in 2005 which acknowledged Indonesia's Independence Day on 17 August 1945. Indonesia and the Netherlands had fallen apart on the issue of recognition of Indonesia as a sovereign state. Since 2008 there is ongoing trilateral cooperation among Indonesia, Malaysia and the Netherlands on fisheries. The Netherlands would serve as a gateway for further cooperation with EU in terms of trade and investment. At the same time, Indonesia started to improve relations with the United Kingdom. Indonesia realized that relations with UK should be improved, even if it does not become as close as Malaysia-UK or India-UK bilateral relations. Relations with Sweden, Finland, and Norway were strained because of these countries' support for Aceh Freedom Movement or GAM. Indonesia's relations with Norway improved this year with an MoU signed on cooperation on climate change.

There has been a thaw in relations with China after 1990. The trade and investment relations with China have been increasing tremendously since the FTA came into force in 2008. Unfortunately in the same year, Indonesia's position changed from trade surplus into deficit. The political problem with China has been its penchant for meddling in domestic issues of Indonesia. PRC likes to revitalize links with Indonesian Chinese diaspora. Indonesia has been cautious, if not in the same high level as Vietnam toward China's

maritime territorial claim in Natuna islands and surrounding territorial sea.

With regard to relations with India, there is inherent inertia despite ambitious bilateral engagement from both Indonesian and Indian leaderships. India has been prioritizing its ties with Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam and subtly ignoring Indonesia. Both are out of the other's first priority objectives. In terms of connectivity, Singapore and Malaysia are members of the Commonwealth along with India. Vietnam gains importance because of India's strategic rivalry with China. There is hope for enhancing Indonesia-India bilateral relations in the present and future as the trade and investment relation is growing in strategic industry.

### Future Perspectives

SBY's first foreign policy objective during his first tenure was for recovering Indonesia's national image in international politics. This objective was successfully achieved under the leadership of foreign minister Hasan Wirayuda. Wirayuda has a maritime background and has shown assertiveness for awakening the country's maritime capability. It is an opportunity also for a country like India which already has capabilities in the maritime domain including ship building to acquire business interests in Indonesia.

In SBY's second tenure, foreign policy is under foreign minister Marty Natalegawa and he is continuing the policy with more focused objectives. The present Indonesian Defence minister is Purnomo Yusgiantoro, an intellectual in international economic, and strategic studies from civilian background, who is showing the way the country looks at security and international politics. Indonesia's evolving democracy and national welfare within global peace, order and justice in the future shows that it is emerging as a middle power. It needs some more effort to reach this status especially given that the foreign ministry's structure is still changing as mentioned in the annual press release. This structural reform would lead to some changes such as rule of conduct for diplomats and priorities for foreign policy. Corruption is still a major challenge in foreign affairs work despite many attempts to enhance operational accountability. As for the policy outline for institutional reform in foreign department, it needs to have better coordination with various other departments and high institutions such as DPR, specifically the 1<sup>st</sup> Commission of the House and other important stakeholders. Indonesia is pursuing an integrative and non-aggressive approach for further regional integration in South East Asia with consent from all other members.