

Military build-up inevitable under Indonesia's new president

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Authors: Pierre Marthinus and Isidora Happy Apsari, Marthinus Academy

The third Indonesian presidential debate on international politics and national defence, held on 22 June, has shed further light on the foreign policy platforms of presidential hopefuls Prabowo Subianto and Joko Widodo ('Jokowi').

Both candidates are offering [two entirely different grand designs](#) ^[1] for foreign policy.



Prabowo's foreign policy outlook is introverted and revolves around the old-school New Order rhetoric of internal stability and territorial integrity. It is focused on maintaining and accumulating Indonesian power, while promoting international clout through domestic prosperity. Prabowo's foreign policy platform prioritises domestic issues, leaving the international realm in the periphery.

On the other hand, Jokowi's foreign policy outlook appears to be more extroverted. It focuses on international clout and Indonesia's power projection capabilities — expanding Indonesia's power to the oceans, the skies and cyberspace, with an outward-oriented focus on economic competitiveness. It is a foreign policy platform that sees Indonesia's new and enlarged sphere of influence in the international realm.

For an insight into the candidates' policies, observers need to look at the [intellectual teams backing each presidential hopeful](#) ^[2]. Jokowi's team consists of *crème de la crème* intellectuals with stellar track records, well-versed in international relations, security and defence — an advantage that backfired in the presidential candidates' debate. Jokowi sounded scripted, his two-metre-long notes revealing a poorly-rehearsed intellectual ventriloquism. Understandably,

Jokowi was trying to keep up and made the honest mistake of presenting himself as an academic expert, instead of presenting himself as a macro-strategist and a creator of national solidarity. Statements on hybrid wars, cyber wars, drone technology and primary weapons defence system (*Alutsista*) ensured that most of his audience was just as lost as he was on the subject of defence.

Despite his own [foreign policy platform](#) ^[3] not even sounding remotely ‘international’, Prabowo called out Jokowi’s platform for being too theoretical and impractical. Prabowo’s team consists of the intellectual underdogs, but he — not his team of advisors — will be the one calling the shots. Prabowo repeatedly made the point that he will ignore his advisors and agree with Jokowi on issues where they both share similar views. Unfortunately, ‘agreeableness’ might not compensate for the lack of creative thinking and alternative policies from his camp.

In terms of Indonesia’s military build-up, each candidate’s foreign policy will dictate a different strategy.

Prabowo’s strategy will consist of military and armament build-up, with less attention paid to its quality and relevance to threats. He will focus on a land-based military build-up and on strengthening the Indonesian military’s territorial command structure. Prabowo will oversee the prioritisation of the army at the expense of the navy and air force. [This can be discerned from](#) ^[4] his strong position on the lack of battalions in many Indonesian districts, his reference to the territorial command structure and his insistence upon the value, usefulness and relevance of Indonesia’s Leopard tanks.

Jokowi’s military build-up [strategy](#) ^[5] will consist of a relative downsizing of the military and armament build-up with more attention paid to attaining superior quality, technology and relevance to threats. His strategy will see a more centralised and coordinated military structure, as well as more synchronised cross-theatre operational capabilities between the army, the navy and the air force.

In terms of accommodating foreign interests, Prabowo made it clear that he will continue President Yudhoyono’s overtly pro-West foreign policy, citing the ‘million friends and zero enemies’ rhetoric. Just like Suharto and Yudhoyono, Prabowo will probably adopt an unthinking pro-West attitude. Jokowi’s team, however, seems more capable of devising alternative and creative policies and more capable of making cool-headed calculations on the national interest — even at the expense of Western powers.

Prabowo’s plan is more conservative, grounded in pragmatism and feasibility, making it the least destabilising and threatening to Western interests and regional stability. In contrast, Jokowi’s platform is more radical, ambitious and optimistic. It is breathtakingly progressive — to the point of advocating for ‘leaps’ in military technology — which also makes it potentially more destabilising to Western interests and regional stability.

When asked about [Australia’s spying](#) ^[6] and incursion into Indonesian waters, both candidates said trust was an issue. But Prabowo [went the extra mile](#) ^[7] to defuse the very tense atmosphere by joking that the audience was much more ‘hostile’ than the presidential

candidates themselves.

Prabowo's 'inward-looking' military build-up may avoid a regional arms race, though it promises a check on China's power should it lay claim to Indonesian territories.

But Jokowi's team might be more experimental and open to new possibilities. Jokowi might even consider more provocative policies such as brandishing Indonesia's [Islamic credentials](#) ^[8] over its democratic identity, taking up the [issue of Palestine](#) ^[9], [growing out of ASEAN](#) ^[10] and [playing the role of regional balancer](#) ^[11] and imposing a maritime toll fee — the last one would surely raise objections from the West.

Even with [modest economic growth](#) ^[12] projections, an Indonesian military build-up is inevitable. Both candidates, running on [nationalist platforms](#) ^[13], desire [a more powerful](#) ^[14] Indonesian military that can project its power. The only difference is that Prabowo prefers a powerful — yet stationary — military presence initially and power projection capabilities later on, while Jokowi seems to prefer it the other way around.

Pierre Marthinus and Isidora Happy Apsari are respectively the executive director and vice executive director for the Marthinus Academy in Jakarta.

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[1] two entirely different grand designs:

<http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/news/indonesian-candidates-debate-defense-foreign-affairs/>

[2] intellectual teams backing each presidential hopeful:

<http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/indonesia-foreign-policy-under-jokowi-and-prabowo/>

[3] foreign policy platform:

<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/07/02/foreign-concepts-in-indonesias-third-presidential-debate/>

[4] This can be discerned from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jU6XKn2K4Yk>

[5] strategy:

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/06/11/beyond-defense-modernization.html>

[6] Australia's spying: <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/11/25/why-australia-deserves-it/>

[7] went the extra mile: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQiBXIFh8i8>

[8] Islamic credentials:

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/03/10/insight-debating-indonesia%E2%80%99s-global-role.html>

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[13] nationalist platforms:

<http://www.indonesia-investments.com/news/todays-headlines/election-indonesia-3rd-presidential-debate-prabowo-subianto-versus-jokowi/item2132>

[14] a more powerful:

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