

Prospect for Indonesia's Foreign Policy in the Reformation Era

By Obsatar Sinaga¹

ABSTRACT. This essay focuses on the prospect for Indonesian foreign policy in the Reformation Era. Projection especially discusses about the real-politic of domestic setting, broader public participation in the foreign policy-making, mass media, public Opinion and foreign policy, institutional coordination.

Concerning the implementation of regional autonomy in Indonesia, the Foreign Office's share in the administrative dealings of the government to abroad is reduced. This, in turn, increases the need for coordination within the bureaucracy and compels the government to subordinate these multifaceted foreign relations to the objectives set by politics and legitimised by parliament if it is to conduct policies which are as consistent as possible and serve Indonesian interests as a whole. The dramatically increasing external activities of ministries not traditionally associated with foreign policy make such coordination more necessary than before.

Finally, this essay discusses change and challenges faced by the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono governments and its successors in the future. At least there are four types of government (Stable Democracy, Unstable Democracy, Stable Authoritarian, and Unstable Authoritarian) and each foreign policy implication.

Keywords: *foreign policy, reformation era, government.*

ABSTRAK. Tulisan ini memusatkan perhatian pada prospek bagi politik luar negeri Indonesia di Era Reformasi. Proyeksi khususnya membahas kondisi realpolitik domestic, keterlibatan publik yang makin luas dalam pembuatan kebijakan luar negeri, mass media, opini public dan kebijakan luar negeri, kooordinasi kelembagaan.

Berkenaan dengan dilaksanakannya otonomi daerah di Indonesia, kantor kementerian luar negeri berbagi peran administrative dengan lembaga lain. Hal ini memerlukan koordinasi dengan semua tingkatan birokrasi dalam pemerintahan untuk mencapai tujuan yang sudah ditetapkan dan dilegitimasi oleh parlemen demi kepentingan nasional Indonesia.

Akhirnya, tulisan ini membahas perubahan dan tantangan yang dihadapi oleh Susilo Bambang YudhoyonoSusilo Bambang Yudhoyono serta pemerintahan Indonesia selanjutnya di masa depan. Tulisan ini menyimpulkan bahwa paling tidak ada empat tipe pemerintahan (Demokratik Stabil, Demokratik Tidak Stabil, Otoriter Stabil, dan Otoriter Tidak Stabil) beserta implikasi politik luar negerinya.

Kata Kunci: *politik luar negeri, era reformasi, pemerintahan.*

¹ A Senior Lecturer at the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Padjadjaran University, Bandung, Indonesia.

In the reformation era if there is one primary question that needs to be answered it is how the Indonesian government implements the principle of "free and active" foreign policy. In other words, is this principle still relevant with the post-Cold War situation in which its condition is far different with the geo-political condition when the principle was first published?, or what is a "free and active" foreign policy in the 21st century?

The Yudhoyono Government advocates a more realistic approach to foreign relations, one that builds harmonious ties between developed and developing states. In fact whatever appearance Indonesia's new foreign policy may present in the near future, the measure of its success should be in how well it serves the nation's interests, at home as well as abroad. Therefore conducting foreign policy the way president Soekarno did in his era almost four decades ago is no longer relevant to the rapidly changing world of today. Indonesia needs to move forward with the fast progress of the world, not back to the heroic slogans like in the past.

The Realpolitik of Domestic Setting

In the era of Yudhoyono's administration Indonesia is still struggling in a period of democratic rivalry among its political centres/power, which theoretically could end with the return to the authoritarianism or moving towards the democratic installation (Casper dan Taylor 1996). The present Indonesian leadership recognises the many challenges to be faced by the country in the future, not only in the economical field, but in the political, social, cultural and foreign policy field as well. It is likely that foreign policy making in the reformation era becomes more diffused than before.

In terms of foreign policy formation and decision-making reveals that in the reformation era the number and weight of foreign policy actors increased. The interactions and involvement of these actors in the Indonesia's foreign policy-making are as follow:

The centre of decision-making in Indonesia rests with the president as mandated to the President by the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), which is the highest body representing the people. It means that in spite of the existence of a wide range of institutions interested in foreign policy issues, the president remains at the centre of decision-making in the field. The question is whether this process will continue into the

future. In the Reformation era the president will not automatically inherit a strong decision-making position like in the period of New Order era. A stronger role for cabinet ministers cannot be ruled out, for instance, a mechanism for coordination between the economic ministers and the foreign ministers, which in the New Order era rests solely with the president, need to be developed.

Decision-making in the field of foreign affairs also rests with the president with the advice of the foreign minister, who is responsible for the implementation of such policy. In addition to the foreign minister, the president receives information and other inputs to policy-making from the commander in chief of the armed forces, especially in areas directly affecting the country's security. The role and involvement of the armed forces in the formation of foreign policy are considered consistent with its defence function. In the area of foreign economic relations, the president mainly relies on economic ministers under a coordinating minister.

The role of the House of Representatives (DPR), through its Committee I in charge of foreign and defence affairs, in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy is limited. Its function is to provide feedback and support to government policies through the institution of hearings. DPR's role in general is more important and effective through the institution of legislation, but this is seldom employed in the field of foreign affairs.

Other sources for feedback are the mass media and public opinion. In line with the views raised in the DPR, public opinion and mass media have been rather critical of the government stances on foreign affairs.

Research and academic institutions also have a role to play in providing the intellectual input to foreign policy-making. These institutions have been in the forefront in the gathering of up to date information and analyses through exchanges of research works and publications and through international meetings.

Broader Public Participation in the Foreign Policy-Making

Since the reformation era, the structural change in foreign policy has been characterised by the four following elements. Firstly, foreign policy has become more comprehensive and contains elements today which used to be of a purely domestic nature. Secondly, foreign policy problems have become more complex. Thirdly, the

number of actors relevant to foreign policy has increased. Finally, foreign policy decisions are taken less and less in a purely national context.

During the New Order Era, the institutions in foreign policy-making were; First, the military including the Ministry of Defence/*Departemen Pertahanan dan Keamanan, Hankam*; the Institute of National Defence/*Lembaga Pertahanan Nasional, Lemhanas*; and the State Intelligence Body/*Badan Koordiansi Intelejen Nasional, Bakin*. Second, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Third, Committee One in the Indonesian Parliament (DPR). Fourth, the National Development Planning Body (*Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional, Bappenas*). Fifth, two think-tank institutions namely Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Indonesian Institute of Science, or *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahun Indonesia/LIPI*. In theory there was a division of labour between various Ministries: the MFA was supposed to handle foreign policy in the political field, the military was supposed to deal with foreign policy which touches on security matters, and Bappenas was supposed to deal with economic matters relating to both domestic and foreign affairs. In practice, in the initial years of the New Order the military often intervened in every field. Its role in foreign policy was only weakened during the later period.

In the post- New Order era the reformation process resulted in appearing new actors in Indonesian foreign relations and foreign policy such as mass media, political parties, parliament, academia, which impact upon a more complex foreign policy-making process than before. Moreover in the era of globalisation the controlling and the accountability of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' performance is something that could not be neglected. Therefore the challenge for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is how to manage Indonesian foreign policy effectively, with coherence, clear focus, and accountability to the public (Luhulima, 2001).

Mass Media, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

Public opinion is considered as one of the several legitimate domestic factors of influence over foreign policy. It has become increasingly important that foreign policy activity actually be in line with public opinion (Wirayuda 2003). As far as democratic theory is concerned, congruence between public opinion and political activity promotes legitimacy while incongruence detracts from it.

In establishing such congruence, the mass media perform an important function as a link between the electorate and the elected. Policy-makers glean information about world events and the attitudes of the public from the media. At the same time governments use the media for the dissemination of their foreign policy positions. They employ public relations methods to address their own population, as well as other decision-makers and the general public of foreign countries (Manheim dan Albritton 1984, 641-657) through 'public diplomacy' or 'media diplomacy'.

Moreover the media can have a direct effect on political attitudes. Given its advantages in terms of topicality and credibility, television has the greatest potential for having an effect (Jordan dan Page 1992, 227-21; Wanta dan Yu-Wie Hu 1993, 250-263).

Concerning with Indonesia's reformation has given Indonesia a vibrant, lively, diverse media filled with important stories and ethical journalists and probing analysis. The feature of Indonesia's media today is as follows: There are approximately 300 newspapers and magazines. In addition to 52 foreign media representatives, there are also 14 foreign news agencies in Indonesia including: Australian Associated Press (Australia); Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata (Italy); Kyodo News Service, Nippon Hoso Kyokai and Visnews Limited (Japan); Bernama and Utusan Melayu (Malaysia); NRC-Handelsblad (The Netherlands); TASS (Russia); Central News Agency (Taiwan); British Broadcasting Corporation and Reuters (United Kingdom); and United Press International and The Associated Press (USA). Broadcast Media

Radio coverage is extensive, because stations are not exclusively owned by the Government, but are also operated by the private sector and supported by hundreds of transmission stations. Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) is the national radio network and broadcasts 24 hours daily, with 52 regional and local stations. *Radio Pemerintah Daerah* is also a Government network broadcasting from the capitals of various regencies and Indonesian provinces. Both broadcast a great deal of coverage helpful to their audiences, including information on topics such as agriculture, health care, religion and current affairs. In addition to those government-owned stations, there are over 921 radio stations in Indonesia which reach over 67 per cent of the country.

Indonesians also watch a broad variety of television programs, both local and international, as evidenced by the proliferation of satellite dishes in Jakarta and other

major cities. While television broadcasts cover 30 per cent of the region, they reach more than 70 percent of the population. In addition to one government-owned network, there are five privately-owned television broadcasting companies.

That mass media can effectively play such a role today is largely because there has been a growing recognition on the part of some of the foreign countries that the Yudhoyono government has indeed adopted a moderate approach and is now greatly imbued with the spirit of reformation and cooperation. Some governments in the West have even shown a greater appreciation of the goals that Indonesia is trying to achieve.

This is indeed fulfilling the current administration's exhortation that the MFA should draw closer to the people-through an effective working relationship with the media.

Policy Advice: Academia and Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is becoming more and more dependent on expert advice. Foreign policy and foreign policy research, practice and theory, are two sides to the same coin. While practical and scientific logic may follow different rules, it is vital that these two areas are linked through a variety of contacts and networks. Policy advice is an academic information service. It requires both a certain academic detachment and at the same time an immediate communicative proximity to policy-making.

Although the literature on the role of policy advice in the decision-making process is not extensive and needs updating and supplementing, the following subdivision into six basic functions is widely accepted and useful: (1) problem identification and early warning; (2) interest and conflict mediation; (3) evaluation; (4) legitimation and justification; (5) making politicians and diplomats aware of key issues – sensitisation; and (6) communication between politics and the general public (Eberwein et al 1994, 34-50 dan McGann 1995). In practice, problem identification and early warning, evaluation and sensitisation play a major role, whereas legitimising policy decisions and conflict mediation play a much smaller one.

In the Indonesian reformation era the involvement of the academic society from universities and non-governmental organisations in the foreign policy-making process revealed promising trends. Since January 2002 The Minister of Foreign Affairs has launched a program 'Foreign Policy Breakfast' which is aimed to be a forum to discuss

Indonesian foreign policy with national leaders and figures in an informal situation and also simultaneously to communicate with the public regarding the implementation of Indonesian foreign policy and to have some feedback from the public.

Institutional Coordination

In a time of Indonesia's transition to be a democratic nation one of the most predominant aspects is the parliamentary participation as a substantive partner of the government (Wanandi 2001). The Parliament no longer plays a rubber stamp role in foreign policy process. The government is now obliged to consult and gain approval from the Parliament before it undertakes major policy change and initiatives.

The legislature has the overall political responsibility vis-à-vis the electorate, whereby the election and support of a workable government, as well as the control of government are its primary duties. A central function of the legislature is to ensure a majority capable of governing. In so doing, it also provides a prerequisite for the state's ability to act in foreign policy.

The most common formal channel of the legislature's participation in foreign policy making is through its Committee on Foreign Affairs and other committees concerned with international issues, such as Committee on Defence Affairs, Committee on Political affairs, and Committee on Economic Affairs. The foreign minister maintains close contact with these committees and uses them to provide information on government policy. By the same token, these committees are where the minister comes into contact with the attitude and criticism of members of the legislature, feedback that can provide important insights for policy. In this regard the Government of the Republic of Indonesia undertakes a number of efforts including conclusion of treaties with other nations, international organisations and other international legal subjects.

The conclusion and ratification of treaties involve a number of state and government institutions and their apparatuses. To achieve the maximum result, a coordination between the relevant institutions is required. For such purpose, it is necessary to promulgate legislation to govern and guarantee the legal certainty of every aspect involved in the conclusion and ratification of a treaty.

Furthermore, concerning the implementation of regional autonomy in Indonesia, the Foreign Office's share in the administrative dealings of the government to abroad is

reduced. This, in turn, increases the need for coordination within the bureaucracy and compels the government to subordinate these multifaceted foreign relations to the objectives set by politics and legitimised by parliament if it is to conduct policies which are as consistent as possible and serve Indonesian interests as a whole. The dramatically increasing external activities of ministries not traditionally associated with foreign policy make such coordination more necessary than before. In other words, for the effective pursuit of consistent national positions in the international arena, coordination with those ministries is imperative (Luhulima 2001).

An agency such as the Ministry of Home Affairs, commonly understood to be concerned primarily with domestic issues, is also concerned, for example, with the following international issues: international crime, illegal immigration, refugees, asylum seekers and border protection. In addition, Ministry for Economic Affairs, whose area of activity is solely abroad, presents the greatest amount of potential conflict interests with the Foreign Office. While the former makes the granting of focussing on development aid subject to the fulfilment of its established criteria, the latter must also take overriding political interests and commitments into account. Conflict of interests arise not only in the relationship between the primacy of foreign policy and the policies of specialised ministries, but also in assessing which specialised ministry's policy is of greater importance to the interests of the government as a whole. This rivalry, most familiar in domestic politics, plays a greater and greater role to the extent that specialised ministries become increasingly relevant to foreign policy.

In this respect, therefore, a number of mechanisms need to be created in order to ensure that the general objectives and guidelines established by the Indonesian government and implemented by the foreign office actually determine Indonesian foreign policy.

Alternative Futures for Indonesia and Its Foreign Policy Performance

All of the above possible challenges for Indonesia are assumed to have an important bearing on the alternative futures for Indonesia and its foreign policy performance in the Reformation era, especially for the Yudhoyono government or its successor in the immediate years ahead.

The direction of future trends of Indonesia's foreign policy in the period of

Yudhoyono government or its successor in the future depend upon past events, critical uncertainties and potentially a range of unknown influences - the possibility of events which cannot be predicted at all. In this regard the assessing trends would be justified by two factors; the form of government (authoritarian and democracy) and indicators which inherent in each projection.

On the model of authoritarian there is a high degree of influence concentration (hierarchical – perfect ordering, strictly top down function). In hierarchical situations, one powerful man (president) dominates the rest. On the contrary, under democratic model there is relatively lower degree of influence concentration (pyramidal, polyarchical, or almost equal – no ordering function), in which every institution has an equal rights depends on the function, none of them dominates the other (Hopkins & Mansbach 1973, 109).

In terms of form of the government there are four options, namely: (1) *Stable Democracy*. Such a state would have found its political equilibrium and, based on the ‘democratic peace hypothesis’ would not be expected to initiate military conflict, except in clear cases of self-defence or with the legitimacy of a United Nations resolution, (2) *Unstable Democracy*. A state which is vulnerable to internal conflict or coup, (3) *Stable Authoritarian*. This could either be an absolute monarchy or a state with a repressive regime. Though such a state has found a political equilibrium, questions of duration and succession arise. Repressive stable authoritarian states tend to use military force to sustain their power base, (4) *Unstable Authoritarian*. Such a state is of greatest immediate concern from an international security viewpoint. On the one hand it has the potential to fragment possibly with a violent civil war. Such a regime might attempt military aggression as a means of generating nationalism and unity.

Moreover, indicators can be envisaged in respect of both what we know and what we do not know (critical uncertainties) about the likely future of a state. For example, it is well known that Indonesia is in a recession, but it is not known its duration or extent; in the case of Indonesia, further economic downturns could be associated with a trend towards less stable government, whereas continued pursuit of the proposed political reforms can be associated with democratisation. Therefore it is a must to allow for the range of possibilities between an early economic recovery and severe long-term

depression, noting that the various potential economic outcomes can be linked generally with the different trends which have been postulated.

Thus, the indicators are very much indicative rather than definitive. Some of the indicators which will alert us to what outcomes might be developing can be identified. These indicators might usefully provide a policy basis for Indonesia's activities in attempting to respond to regional developments and to shape the strategic environment towards its most favoured outcome.

Based on the above two considerations (form of the government and indicators), the apparent alternatives for Indonesia would appear to be as follows:

Alternative 1 – Stable Democracy: (1) **Features;** Political, social, legal and economic reform measures and peace initiatives in disputed provinces take effect, promoting a return of economic confidence, (2) **Indicative Outcome;** Stable democratic political structures achieved and restoration of (initially modest?) economic growth, (3) **Indicators;** Good progress by the Yudhoyono government or its successor in implementing promised democratic reforms are a good basis on which this can be built; Absence of substantial riots; TNI continues to show a high level of restraint; Completion of TNI combat troops withdrawal from disputed provinces; Growth of international economic support – especially from USA, IMF, World Bank etc; Return of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs and financiers; Positive response to 'peace initiatives' in disputed provinces (4) **Implication for Foreign Policy;** Indonesia's foreign policy appears increasingly to be the product of a rational response to internal and external demands. The Indonesian government undertakes a series of domestic measures and foreign policy decisions which fundamentally alter its orientation toward the outside world. The Indonesia's foreign policy objectives are directed to mobilise international resources to assist in the country's economic rehabilitation and development and to ensure a secure regional environment which would allow Indonesia to concentrate on its domestic agenda.

Alternative 2 – Unstable Democracy: (1) **Features;** Good progress made on democratic reform measures and peace initiatives in disputed provinces, but effects of recession prove dominant, (2) **Indicative Outcome;** A more democratic form of government achieved, but domestic social stability undermined by continuing economic recession. Reduced government ability to exercise rule of law, increase in 'economic

refugees.’ Potential for political breakdown and thus regression to authoritarian, military backed government in the medium to longer term, (3) **Indicators**; Good progress by the Yudhoyono government or its successor implementing promised democratic reforms; Positive response to ‘peace initiatives’ in disputed provinces; Continued recession which generates ‘food riots’ and large refugee flows; Ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs reluctant to return; Lack of external economic investment; Loss of international banking and monetary support, (4) **Implication for Foreign Policy**; Indonesia’s foreign policy is assumed to the efforts that Indonesia needs international support and assistance, particularly to ensure Indonesia’s territorial integrity, to sustain Indonesia’s economic recovery and to help in Indonesia’s democratic consolidation.

Alternative 3 – Stable Authoritarian: (1) **Features**; Government uses further insurrection (food riots, refugee flows etc.) as an excuse to divert from political reform, but continues to seek peaceful solutions in the disputed provinces, (2) **Indicative Outcome**; Indonesia remains a guided democracy, becoming more authoritarian than before. A hard government line in practice would be softened superficially to appease external interests. The economy would stabilize in line with a general Asian economic recovery, (3) **Indicators**; Use of political resistance to justify more authoritarian measures by government; TNI suppression of riots etc. is conducted by a firm but measured application of force; Removal of TNI combat troops from disputed provinces leads to a relaxation of tension, accompanied by peaceful negotiations on a compromise solution; Return of some ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in response to restored social stability; Provision of some external economic support from international banking and monetary institutions, (4) **Implication for Foreign Policy**: The effectiveness of initiatives and the formulation of foreign policy depend on the President’s personal leadership style, political experience and greater appreciation of overall foreign policy situations.

Alternative 4 – Unstable Authoritarian: (1) **Features**; Continuing recession leads to insurrection which necessitates continuous use of TNI to maintain law and order. TNI action may involve excessive force and human rights violations. Government stretched to cope and thus forced to concede to demands such as granting autonomy/independence to one or more disputed provinces. Indonesian government policies are poorly received by the world community, (2) **Indicative Outcome**;

Indonesia is fractured politically, the economy regresses to a stagnant low income level, with 50% or more of the population below the poverty level. Disputed provinces and possibly other remote areas break away either to become independent states, autonomous regions or to seek a merger with neighbouring states. Continuing economic recession leads to breakdown of TNI solidarity causing political infighting, (3) **Indicators;** Food riots and looting; Insurrection/resistance in disputed provinces; Political riots; Harsh TNI intervention on a continuous basis; International condemnation of Indonesian government/military actions; Refugee outflows; Chinese entrepreneurs consolidate in their new overseas locations; Some form of belligerence by Indonesia towards its neighbours, (4) **Implication for Foreign Policy;** The Indonesian government drastically reduces its external contacts and imposes a variety of measures which are designed to end external penetration into Indonesian society, economics, and politics. Foreign investors, donors are persuaded to stay away.

All the alternative futures for Indonesia above should be in the mind of every Indonesian to cope with the needs of the 21st century challenges in a “new life of Indonesia”.

As my final remarks, for those who concern with the future of Indonesia, please bear in mind that Indonesia is reforming and needs understanding and assistance from its neighbours and friends. For the short term, the prospect is still somewhat uncertain – but encouraging, nonetheless. The long term view remains the same: a stable and prosperous Indonesia is best for every one of its neighbours and the world. In answer to critics, who point out how far Indonesia is from stability and prosperity, I respond: “Don’t look at a snapshot. Indonesia is a country in process. Look at the moving picture.”

Sekilas Tentang penulis:

Dr. H. Obsatar Sinaga adalah alumni Jurusan Hubungan Internasional Fisip Universitas Padjajaran Bandung. Saat ini penulis menjabat sebagai Sekretaris Program Studi Hubungan Internasional Pasca Sarjana Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Padjadjaran. Penulis juga mengajar Pasca Sarjana di beberapa perguruan tinggi di Bandung dan Jakarta. Saat ini sudah tujuh buah buku yang ditulis oleh Dr. H. Obsatar Sinaga.

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