

Southeast Asian Journal of Social and Political Issues

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Faculty of Social and Political Sciences
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Re-engagement in American Foreign Policy toward Southeast Asia: Some Responses and Perspectives from Indonesians*

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Abstract

The United States (US) government has taken some new initiatives in South East Asia during Barrack Obama administration. Notable among these are a close cooperation with Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines to counter terrorism, a rapprochement with Indonesia, a continuing military and economic support to Singapore and Malaysia and a renewing commitment to help the Philippines in South China Sea conflicts. In fact, the region has got new significance for the US government after the end of Communist threats with the continuing threats from terrorism and the emergence of China power in this region. Given the importance of these changes, this paper focuses on how these changes have been responded in Indonesia by both the government and civil society. The responses from Indonesian government have been usually positive to the US interests and even seen as in line with Indonesian national interests. However, there have been criticisms toward the close ties between the Indonesia and the US government in societal level. Although the civil society concerns on the relations have been marginally ignored, there are some points to discuss them since they relate to the battle of ideas of how the US should play role in the world. In the short run, it does not influence the government to government relations but in the long run it may continue inspire anti-US actions and policies both within the civil society and government officials.

Keywords: US foreign policy, terrorism, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, civil society.

A. Introduction

The United States has played a significant role in the life of Indonesians both in the past and at present. Under Barack Hussein Obama administration, the relations of both countries seem to be in a very good shape. President Obama visited Indonesia on 9-

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10 November 2010 and signed the U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership covering many areas of cooperation including military cooperation that has been halted since 1999.

However, Indonesia's history and its principle of maintaining an independent and active foreign policy have complicated Indonesia's relationship with the United States. All administrations in Indonesia have been cautious in developing a close relationship with the United States (the US). The end of the Cold War, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the counterterrorism policies of the administration of President George W. Bush and later Barack Obama have all influenced the attitudes of Indonesians toward the United States.

This paper attempts to examine further responses from some Indonesians towards US re-engagement with Southeast Asia, particularly with Indonesia, since the end of the Cold War and particularly during Obama administration. There have been hopes among Indonesians that Obama would bring changes to US foreign policy in the sense that the US would use more peaceful approaches in solving problems related to US interests in the world. It is also generally expected that Obama will pay special attention to Indonesia given the fact that he has emotional attachment to Indonesia originating from his childhood time in Jakarta.

This expectations, however, for some Muslim groups seem to be disappearing after the US has not shown significant departure from the previous Bush's foreign policy. This paper is divided into four sections. First, it traces history of relations between Indonesia and the US until Suharto's time. Secondly, it discusses relations between the two states after Suharto which notify significant departure for Indonesia's foreign policy because of the country's transformation into a democratic state. Thirdly, it shows general perspectives of Indonesians to the US. Fourthly, it elaborates mixed responses of Indonesians to Obama's foreign policy.

B. History of Relations with the United States

Indonesia-U.S. relations started formally in December 1949, when the United States recognized Indonesia's independence following the transfer of authority from the Dutch colonial authorities to the Indonesian government. Early relations between the two countries can be traced back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when traders from Massachusetts visited Southeast Asia in search of new products. The traders had contacts with the sultan of Aceh (a sultanate in northern Sumatra), who offered the traders access to the sea near Aceh. In the early twentieth century, during Dutch rule, the United States also had rubber and petroleum industries in Indonesia.

In more modern times, relations between the two countries developed during Indonesia's struggle for independence (1945-1949). Initially Indonesia did not receive support from the United States, and when the United States first made overtures, Indonesians were suspicious of the United States' objectives. The United States only

became interested in supporting the Indonesian independence movement when it began to fear that, without U.S. support, Indonesia might lean toward the Soviet Union—a fear that arose following the rebellion by Communist-inspired insurgents at Madiun (East Java) in 1948. At this point the United States became more active in pressuring the Dutch to engage in dialogue with the leaders of the Indonesian independence movement. U.S. support of the Indonesian independence movement was quite significant at this time and provided a positive experience for Indonesia's leaders and optimism regarding future relations with the United States.⁴

The Sukarno Years: Maintaining Independence and Neutrality

The nature of Indonesia's contact with the United States during its struggle for independence did not automatically mean that it would become a U.S. ally in the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. On the contrary, Indonesians felt that Indonesia should take its own position in international relations rather than falling in line behind either superpower, an opinion that Mohammad Hatta, Indonesia's prime minister from 1948 to 1950, voiced in a speech in 1948.⁵

During the 1950–1957 period of liberal democratic experimentation in Indonesia, the relations between the two countries were primarily influenced by the domestic political situation in Indonesia. The principle of establishing and maintaining independence was the base on which Indonesia's parliamentary parties constructed their foreign-policy manifestos.⁶ There was a pervasive feeling among sections of Indonesia's elite that there should be a balance in relations with the United States and the Soviet Union. Indonesia sought to avoid becoming trapped in the orbit of either U.S. or Soviet power and also to avoid conflict between the two powers and their political blocs. Although the United States called the policy “naive neutralism,” Indonesia continued to apply this policy and went on to organize the famous Asia-African conference in 1955, which clearly emphasized the neutral and free position of Indonesia and other Asian and African countries in the Cold War.

The period from 1957 to 1965 saw relations between the two countries come under increasing pressure, especially in the light of U.S. attempts to influence politics in Indonesia by supporting a regional rebellion against the central government in Jakarta and by intervening in several local conflicts. The policies of the United States strengthened the increasingly virulent anti-American rhetoric of Indonesia's first president, Sukarno. Sukarno strongly emphasized the *Nasakom* (*Nasionalisme, Agama dan Komunis*: Nationalism, Religion, and Communism) ideology. In conjunction with this domestic ideological approach, Sukarno promoted an anticolonialist, anti-imperialist and, significantly, anti-neocolonialist campaign. For Sukarno, the United States

⁴ IIP Home Page. (1999, December 6). Fifty years of U.S.-Indonesian diplomatic relations. Speech by U.S. Ambassador Robert S. Gelbard to the Conference on U.S.-Indonesian Relations, Jakarta, Indonesia. Retrieved December 1, 2004, from <http://www.usembassyjakarta.org/news/anniversary50th.html>

⁵ Michael Leifer, *Indonesia's foreign policy*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1983.

⁶ *Ibid.*

represented the capitalist and imperialist camp. In 1960 Sukarno characterized both the United States and the Soviet Union as the Oldefos (Old Established Forces), whereas Indonesia and other newly independent countries in Asia and Africa were the Nefos (New Emerging Forces). On one occasion, Sukarno rejected aid from the United States by saying to the U.S. ambassador, "Go to hell with your aid."

Sukarno was a skilful orator and used his rhetoric to manipulate the antagonisms and alliances of the Cold War period to attempt to achieve his own increasingly personal and grandiose objectives. Sukarno's growing confidence in his foreign-policy program led to an escalation of the campaign to "free" the territory of West Irian, which had not been included in the transfer of territory from the Dutch in 1949. In 1962 Sukarno manipulated the United States into forcing the Dutch to negotiate and settle the West Irian problem. He did so by deploying Indonesian military forces against the Dutch: Fearing that this conflict might develop into something that would threaten the stability of Southeast Asia and that Indonesia might seek support from the Soviet Union if the conflict proved protracted, the United States applied strong pressure on the Dutch to negotiate with Indonesia.⁷

The Suharto Years: An Anti-Communist Stance

Sukarno was deposed by Suharto in 1965. During Suharto's presidency (1967–1998), relations between Indonesia and the United States improved. Suharto was a vehement anti-Communist, and the improvement in U.S.-Indonesian relations started with the tacit support the United States provided to the Indonesian army to destroy the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) between 1966 and 1970. Indonesia badly needed aid at this point, and the United States assisted in Indonesia's economic recovery. Indonesia's pro-growth economic policy relied on the United States and its European and Japanese allies for main support.

It was during this period that many Indonesian academics began to study in the United States. The economists who were trained at the University of California (the so-called Berkeley Mafia) and later became ministers were instrumental in creating the economic policy known as the New Order. Thousands of Indonesians studied in the United States thanks to sponsorship provided by foundations such as the Rockefeller and Fulbright, as well as USAID. Among the prominent Muslim figures who studied in the United States were the scholar Nurcholish Madjid, the politician Amien Rais, and Syafi'i Ma'arif, the head of Muhammadiyah, the second-largest Muslim organization in Indonesia. During the 1970s, although Indonesia still formally remained unaligned, it joined the United States in countering Communist threats in Southeast Asia by using diplomatic ways. This is consistent with her non-alignment foreign policy where Indonesia only fought domestic Communist threats and did not send troops outside of Indonesia.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Indonesia also used its close relations with the United States in its 1975 takeover of East Timor, a territory that had been a Portuguese colony and that is contiguous with Indonesia. Threats concerning Communism in that region became a justification for its takeover. U.S. support for Indonesia's rule ended with the end of the Cold War in 1991, however. Without the support of the United States and with many countries expressing unhappiness over the occupation, B. J. Habibie, who replaced Suharto as Indonesia's president in 1998, adopted a new attitude toward the region. Under United Nations auspices a referendum was conducted in East Timor, the result of which was overwhelming support for independence. Indonesia withdrew from the former Portuguese colony in 1999.

C. Relations after Suharto

After the fall of Suharto in 1998, the relations between the two countries enter new era. Actors in Indonesia foreign policy are not mainly the government but also groups including religious groups, political parties and media. Some policies made by Indonesian government often create controversy in the society level.

At the beginning of post-Suharto period, the relations between the two countries were tested by the East Timor case. Following the change of Indonesia into a democratic state, BJ Habibie government which replaced Suharto, responded to East Timor problems by calling for a democratic solution to the area by a referendum. During the referendum, the East Timorese decided in a clear majority to get independent instead of joining as part of Indonesia. In responding to this decision, Indonesia military was not happy and still supported some pro-integration to Indonesia groups that created some clashes in East Timor. The violence that surrounded East Timor's struggle for independence, such as the Dili massacre of 11 November 1991, strained relations between the United States and Indonesia. The United States ceased its military aid to Indonesia. In Indonesia, U.S. pressure concerning human rights and democracy was viewed unfavorably as interference in Indonesia's domestic problems.

The above case was followed with another issue that influenced Indonesia-the US relations. The U.S. response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. aroused controversy in Indonesia. The Indonesian government and the majority of the Indonesian people supported U.S. efforts to find the perpetrators. However, although the Indonesian government supported the U.S. actions in Afghanistan, it did not support the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Indonesia itself has also experienced three massive terrorist bomb blasts: at Denpasar, Bali, in 2002, at the H. J. W. Marriott Hotel, Jakarta, in August 2003, and the Australian embassy bombing in Jakarta in September 2004. Some of the perpetrators of these bomb attacks have been arrested and imprisoned.

Although Indonesia government supports the US policy to counter terrorism in Southeast Asia, people reactions are not similar. Megawati Sukarnoputri, Indonesia second President after reformation in her visit to US guarantee Indonesia support to US

anti-terrorism policy but back home she was criticized for being too weak to the US pressure and her government was criticized for leaving the principle of free and active foreign policy. She needed to clarify her initial statement that her policy was not to support the US but to support international efforts to fight terrorism. Before this, in giving response to the 9/11 attack, her Vice President Hamzah Haz made a controversial statement by saying that the attacks were a balance punishment for the US Middle East policy for long time.⁸

During this so-called reformation era, Indonesian foreign policy to a certain degree was informed by domestic pressures. This was the case with the above public pressures to Megawati policy and to her predecessor Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono commonly called by nickname SBY. During SBY, Indonesian foreign policy in general and to the US in particular was under close scrutiny by both Members of Parliament and public in general. This is the case with Indonesia changing stand from supporting the US to embargo Iran to abstain in the next voting in the United Nations.

When Obama came to office replacing Bush, there have been wide expectations that he would bring changes in the US foreign policy in a sense that he would pay attention to Muslim interests in the world such as to solve Palestine issues. He is also expected to build a close relation with Indonesia because of his personal closeness to Indonesia during his childhood time. After being delayed twice because of his tight domestic schedule, he finally made a visit to Indonesia. He got warm welcome and gave a speech at famous Islamic State University, Jakarta. In that occasion he outline again his foreign policy and support a close relation with Indonesia.

In the visit, the Comprehensive Partnership between two countries showing the closeness of relations between the two states was signed. It includes military cooperation which has been cut off by the US for several years because of the involvement of several military personnel in human right violence in East Timor after it gained independence following 1999 referendum. The cooperation also includes economic, education and to tackle global environment and climate change.⁹ Most of the cooperation, however, only continues previous cooperation that has been established for a long time. Although some academics such as Ann Marie Murphy might say this shows a rapprochement of the US to Indonesia and recognition of Indonesia's achievement in democracy and its potency to become a dominant power in global governance,¹⁰ Indonesia is not as significance as some states such as China for America. Indonesia does not have good economy and in whatever ways cannot help America to overcome its financial crisis, whereas China plays significant role in the recovery of the US economy.¹¹

⁸ "Indonesian Islamic Party Forum Advocates Embargoing American Products", *Detikworld*, 21 September 2000.

⁹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-indonesia-comprehensive-partnership>

¹⁰ Ann Marie Murphy, 'U.S. Rapprochement with Indonesia: From Problem State to Partner', *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* - Volume 32, Number 3, December 2010, pp. 362-387

¹¹ R. William Liddle, 'Makna Kunjungan Obama (The Meaning of Obama's Visit)', *Kompas*, 9 November 2010.

D. General Perspectives on the United States

Since Indonesia's independence, government-to-government (G to G) relations between Jakarta and Washington have been the principal basis on which the relationship between the two countries has developed. Personal contacts rarely took places. Notwithstanding business relationships and student exchange—the United States ranks first as a destination for overseas study for Indonesia students—overall, personal ties between Indonesians and Americans remain rather limited. During the Suharto's period, the G to G relations were relatively easy to manage. However, after Suharto, there have been changes in the shape of relations.¹² Personal contacts might not much but exchanges of views occur dramatically through media, which nowadays enjoys openness and freedom. Through media, many interest groups, political parties and religious groups voice their concerns on many foreign policy issues, including Indonesia-the US relations.

It often happens that for both governments, these concerns were seen as representing sentiments and emotions of certain groups and did not really represent national interests of their nations. As Indonesian President Yudhoyono said his government did not want to deal with these kinds of emotions and stereotypes because his main concerns are national interests of Indonesian.¹³ However, in contrast to this view, this paper argues that people and groups concerns on the US-Indonesia relations represent something fundamental with regard to justice, freedom and equality in world politics currently dominated by the US as the only superpower. Therefore, it is important to discuss people views in relations of both countries. In the long run, they may shape directions of Indonesia's policy toward America.

Nevertheless, given the vast ethnic, religious, and economic diversity of Indonesia's population, it is very difficult to outline definitively Indonesia's perspectives on the United States. What we are able to identify are general attitudes and beliefs of some individuals and groups – including Islamic groups – as well as the attitude of the Indonesian government towards the United States.

Historical Perspectives

Many Indonesians view the United States as a superpower, a great democratic country, and the best example of democracy in the world. This view has been in existence since the prerevolutionary period. Indonesian nationalist movements indirectly learned about freedom and justice from the examples of the United States and other Western countries, and Indonesia's 1945 constitution, particularly the preamble, resembled the style and aspects of the U.S. Constitution.

¹² Alatas, A. (2004, March 31). U.S.-Indonesia relationship enters new era. Jakarta Post. Retrieved December 1, 2004, from <http://www.kabar-irian.com/pipermail/kabar-irian/2004-March/000456.html>

¹³ Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, "Indonesia and America: A Twenty-First Century Partnership", Speech at the USINDO Luncheon, Washington, D.C., 14 November 2008, <<http://www.presidentri.go.id/index.php/eng/pidato/2008/11/15/1032.html>>.

Both the United States and Indonesia had to draw together fractious states to form one united whole state. Indonesia's struggle for unity, which was marked by a succession of regional rebellions and other forms of revolt, while different in a number of significant respects from the United States' Civil War history, has nonetheless some basic similarities. Following negotiations with the Dutch in 1949, Indonesia became formally the Republic of the United States of Indonesia (RUSI), a name that echoed that of the United States of America. Indonesia adopted the presidential system, which, although considerably different in application, was the basis of both polities. Both countries were founded on strong religious principles (one Christian, one Muslim), and both retain strong religious minority sectional interests.¹⁴

After independence, Indonesia faced the reality of a world divided between the U.S.-led Western bloc and the Soviet-led Eastern bloc. Influenced by a deeply felt spirit of nationalism and perceiving that the superpowers only promoted their own interests (ahead of those of others, even their allies), the leaders of Indonesia chose to maintain an independent foreign policy. Almost all leaders of the country were very sensitive to Indonesia's position and were reluctant to be seen to be too close to either the United States or the Soviet Union. A relationship that was too close, or perceived as such, would be seen by many in Indonesia as yielding to the hegemony of the biggest world powers, showing weakness and submission. Instead, Indonesia managed to manipulate the competition between the East and the West to push its own agenda, as seen above.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Indonesia could no longer credibly threaten to turn to an alternative superpower to elicit U.S. support.¹⁵ Although Indonesians still baulked at U.S. interference in Indonesian affairs, U.S. influence was considered to be significant in the changing attitude toward human rights, as shown by the formation of the Human Right Commission in 1993. (The government still argued that it had intended for a long time to form the commission and had done so under the pressure of any foreign country.) Less well received was the United States' perceived influence on the International Monetary Fund's plan for the recovery of the Indonesian economy following the Asian economic crisis of 1997. It was that pressure that began to make many Indonesians perceive the United States no longer as a benign hegemony but as an arrogant superpower.

Perspectives toward US during Bush Administration

Attitudes toward U.S. popular culture, September 11, the Iraq war, and the United States' antiterrorism policy have all influenced current Indonesian opinions about the United States during Bush administration.

¹⁴ Kahin, G. (1994). The Impact of American foreign policy. In D. Burchier and J. Legge (Eds.), *Democracy in Indonesia: 1950s and 1990s*. Clayton, Australia: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University.

¹⁵ T. Kivimäki, U.S.-Indonesian relations during the economic crisis: Where has Indonesia's bargaining power gone? *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 22(3), 2000, 527-549.

The first important issue to be discussed with regards to the US relates to popular culture. U.S. popular culture has had a noticeable influence on Indonesia. U.S. fast food restaurants, such as McDonald's, KFC, and Pizza Hut, are among the most popular restaurants for many people in Indonesia's biggest cities. In the last five years, Starbucks cafés have become one of the most prestigious places for Indonesia's elite to spend their time drinking coffee, whether it is during lunchtime or after work. It is now also easy to find discotheques, nightclubs, and other places of entertainment in big Indonesian cities.

Hollywood films also dominate movie cinemas in Indonesia, with the Indonesian print media devoting special sections to the reviewing of U.S. films. U.S. movie stars and singers are very well known in Indonesia and often appear in Indonesian newspapers and magazines, and many young Indonesians admire them. Valentine's Day has become very popular in Indonesia, especially during the last ten years, and many teenagers use the occasion to express their love to their friends.

U.S. television program and movies dominate television viewing in Indonesia. Some Indonesian television programs imitate such U.S. hits as *American Idol*. *Indonesian Idol* has become one of the most popular television shows in the country. Most middle- and upper-class citizens of Indonesia nowadays prefer shopping in U.S.-style supermarket and malls instead of going to traditional markets. All of these factors have influenced the lifestyle of young Indonesians.

Not all Indonesians have accepted U.S. cultural influences however. Parents complain that their teenagers have forgotten their own culture and have adopted a Western lifestyle. They see that the younger generation has copied the fashion, entertainment, way of speaking, style, and hobbies of their peers in the West. Some religious leaders argue against this influence on moral grounds, stating that it violates religious principles. They allege that Valentine's Day is a Christian product that should not be adopted by Muslim Indonesians. Similarly they argue that programs such as *American Idol* are part of a wave of cultural imperialism that is sweeping Indonesia from the West. In their view Western idols and myths are destroying people's hearts and minds. These views to a lesser degree are also shared by secular leftists such as anti-neoliberal movement in Indonesia. They see that Indonesia has been sold to foreign interests and companies, and as consequences they demand government to lessen the dependence to foreign capitals particular the US capital. They also see the International Monetary, World Bank, World Trade Organization and other economic international bodies are part of parcel of American hegemonic bodies.

Early on during the Afghanistan war in 2002, some radical Islamic groups singled out McDonald's as a symbol of U.S. domination of the Indonesian economy. These groups were highly critical of U.S. support for Israel and involvement in the Middle East conflict. In 2002, a McDonald's outlet in Makassar, South Sulawesi, was bombed, and five people were killed. When the perpetrators were arrested in early October 2004, they expressed anti-U.S. sentiment.

Another perspective is towards September 11's tragedy. Indonesians viewed the September 11 tragedy and what followed with mixed feelings. The government of President Megawati Sukarnoputri (served 2001–2004) issued a statement condemning

the terrorist attacks. She was one of the first world leaders to meet President George W. Bush after the attacks, and she said that the Indonesian government would support the U.S. war against terrorism, including the plan to send troops to Afghanistan to track down Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda operatives behind the attack. However this policy produced a diverse range of feelings within Indonesian society. Even Megawati's vice president, Hamzah Haz, took a different position from Megawati, criticizing the United States' antiterrorist policies and stating that the United States was the real terrorist because of the unjustness of its international policies. Megawati was criticized for bowing to U.S. pressure because of her statement of support for the U.S.-led war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

So-called radical Islamic groups such as Laskar Jihad, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam), Hizb al-Tahrir, and Jamaah Al Ikhwan al-Muslimin Indonesia all protested the government's position, demanding a stop to its support of the United States. The Muslim Prosperous Justice Party, whose support increased in the 5 April 2004 general election, is also critical of the United States' treatment of Muslims and Muslim countries. Prior to the U.S. offensive in Afghanistan, there had been many anti-U.S. protests and threats to assault U.S. citizens. The demonstrators believed that the United States' target was not Osama bin Laden, but the religion of Islam in general.

A more moderate segment of the population also regretted the speedy reaction of the United States to the September 11 attacks and the tendency to characterize Osama bin Laden as representative of the entire Muslim community. Wimar Witoelar, spokesman for Indonesia's former president Abdurrahman Wahid (who held office prior to Megawati Sukarnoputri, from 1999 to 2001), said that Osama might be a Muslim, but he did not have authority to perpetrate the attacks in the name of Islam.¹⁶ Witoelar said that the perpetrators of the attack were madmen. Abdurrahman Wahid agreed, saying that the attacks on the World Trade Center were attacks against humanity. However, he added that the attack on Afghanistan was a treachery to both humanity and international law. He further said that the attack was very bad and he disappointed to see that the U.S. reacted emotionally and did not look for an alternate solution.¹⁷

The third perspective warranting for discussion relates to the war in Iraq and U.S. Antiterrorism Policies. War in Iraq invited much protest from Indonesian society, not only from radical Muslims, but also from the more moderate Muslims, such as those in the Islamic Liberal Network. The U.S. attack on Iraq was considered a unilateral action taken without the support of the United Nations. The majority of Muslims argue that the United States continues to implement a double-standard policy by continuing to support Israel in spite of Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and what are perceived as Israel's human rights abuses in the occupied territories.

¹⁶ Wimar Witoelar, *Ce qui change, c'est l'Amérique, pas nous* [What has changed is America, not us]. *Le Monde interactif*. Retrieved December 1, 2004, from <http://www.perspektif.net/articles/view.asp?id=108>. Indonesian-language version retrieved December 1, 2004, from <http://www.perspektif.net/articles/view.asp?id=109>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Five Indonesian religious leaders who met with Bush in Bali in October 2003 voiced criticisms of the U.S. antiterrorist policy that expressed the above view. Syafi'i Ma'arif, the head of Muhammadiyah, stated that the Bush government had wasted the opportunity to become a benign leader and to foster a culture of global wisdom.

Moderate Muslim leaders have attempted to maintain and promote their moderate Islamic views, which are supported by the majority of younger-generation Muslims. The government and certain elements of civil society, such as the two biggest moderate Muslim organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, have taken major steps to combat terrorism. Both organizations regularly state their standpoint to discredit terrorism and explain this is not part of jihad in Islam. They are, however, also very critical of United States' unilateral action in Iraq and threats to Muslim countries. They believe that violence cannot be stopped by using violence; rather, that course will inevitably lead to more violence. According to these groups, the roots of terrorism lie in injustice, alienation, ignorance, and prejudices that are present in the world.

After witnessing U.S. involvement in Iraq and the casualties of this war, many Muslim groups and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) communities have developed a stronger, more negative perception of the United States. They suggest that the United States is trying systematically to destroy the Muslim world. They believe that there have been Western military, political, and economic conspiracies to weaken Islamic countries. Hidayat Nur Wahid, the leader of the emerging Prosperous Justice Party, who was elected in 2004 as the speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly, stated that the United States has a new colonialist policy and intends to create a world empire by using military force and world economic bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization.

The above attitudes are reflected in the policies of the groups that hold them. When Bush showed his commitment to support education in Islamic schools in 2003 in an attempt to reduce the growing militant Islamic influence in Indonesia, some Islamic groups saw it as interfering in Indonesian education. About one thousand *pesantren* leaders cautioned people to be careful about accepting the funds for fear that if a *pesantren* accepted the funds, it might end up producing Islamic leaders supportive of or likely to become puppets of the United States. The negative image and perception of the United States was also reflected in some *pesantrens'* rejection of books distributed by the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta during the August–September 2004 period.

E. Responses toward Obama Administrations

Attitudes toward Obama himself, his foreign policy and the implementation of the policy have influenced current Indonesian opinions about the United States during Obama administration.

Obama is an interesting figure for many Indonesians. This is particularly because of his childhood time in Indonesia which creates a kind of emotional ties between many Indonesians and Obama. During his presidential campaigns, history of Obama during his

childhood as an elementary school student in Jakarta was recalled and told in many books and media including translated books about him. Even a movie about his time in Indonesia was produced and popular among Indonesians. All these have increased emotional attachment of some Indonesians to Obama. Obama statue was also made and put nearby his former elementary school. No wonder that many people expected him to win the US 1999 Presidential elections at that time.

Obama was also seen to bring new foreign policy which can support peaceful solution to many world problems. Apart from expecting that Obama would pay more attention to Indonesia's interests, many Indonesian also expected that he would solve Israeli-Palestine conflicts in a more balance approach than that during Bush administration. Obama plans to close the American military prison at Guantanamo Bay and to withdraw troops from Iraq were also seen as good foreign policy.

Obama popularity clearly influences the ways many Indonesians see America. In 2009 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project, the percentage of Indonesians who had a favorable attitude to America jumped from 37 per cent in 2008 to 63 per cent in 2009.¹⁸ The survey conducted in May-June of 2009 found the percentage with an unfavorable view dropped from 53% to 30%. In its report, 69% of young Indonesians ages 18-29 show their positive views on the US.¹⁹

The above positive views on the US, however, do not reflect the whole perceptions of Indonesians to America. Anti-American groups mentioned in the previous parts such as Laskar Jihad, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam), Hizb al-Tahrir, and Jamaah Al Ikhwan al-Muslimin maintain their critical stands on America. These groups do not taken for granted all promises that Obama made during his campaigns. They are even doubt that Obama will materialize all his promises to make good relations with Muslim world.

Their critical stands were proven right after Obama won the election. In his first foreign policy statement, Obama stated in front of a main Jews group, American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), that Israel security is sacred and deniable. He said that he would do any action against Iran to stop that country from having nuclear weapons.²⁰ Criticisms to Obama foreign policy came also from the same persons who also criticized Bush policies, such as Hidayat Nurwahid, one leader of Indonesia's largest Islamic party, PKS. In an interview with Jakarta Metro TV on Obama's Middle East policy, Nurwahid showed his disappointment because Obama did not respect

¹⁸ <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1529/indonesian-views-america-image-president-obama-trip>

¹⁹ Before this there have been fluctuations of attitude among Indonesians toward the US. According to the 2003 Global Attitudes Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, only 15 percent of the Indonesian population has a favorable attitude toward the United States; this has decreased sharply from more than 60 percent in the 1980s. The result of the survey reflected concerns of many Indonesian on the ways Bush overcome terrorisms in particular concerns were addressed to the bad treatment to terrorist suspects in Guantanamo and to the attacks toward Afghanistan. However, this has been improved to 37 per cent in 2008. This was particularly because of significant helps given by America to help Indonesia during Tsunami than hit Aceh province at the end of 2004. When Obama won the US Presidential elections in 2009, there had been a lot of expectation that he would bring changes in the US foreign policy.

²⁰ http://www.bbc.co.uk/indonesian/news/story/2008/06/080604_obamaisrael.shtml

Palestine's rights. In particular he said that the US did not react strongly to human rights violations during Israel's raid on the humanitarian ship, Mavi Marmara. The US also did not support the formation of panel to investigate the incident. Another critical anti-America figure, Habib Rizieq commenting on Obama's visit to Jakarta, said that Obama just wanted to get sympathies from Indonesian Muslims to close the US criminal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Disillusionment to Obama policy was also shown by a leader of Islamic Ummah Forum (Forum Umat Islam - FUI) Muhammad Al Khaththath. He said that Obama have lied to Muslim World by sending more troops to Afghanistan in 2010, in contrast to his speech in Egypt, when he said that he wanted to build good relations with Muslim worlds. That speech according to Khaththath was only a lip service to get sympathies from Muslims. This statement was supported by Tony Syarqi in his book "Presiden AS Pertama yang 100% Yahudi" (The First-American-100%-Jews President). In the conclusion of his book, he said that Obama foreign policy since the beginning serve only two interests that are the US and Israeli interests.²¹

The FUI was the main organization where these anti-American groups and persons unite. In responding to the visit of Obama to Indonesia, this organization consisting of more than 30 small Islamic groups rejected his visit to Jakarta. It demanded the government and Indonesians to reject the visit and asked people to pray for the safety and freedom of Palestinians. In its statement, FUI blamed America's aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan and its continuing supports to Israel's occupation of Palestine lands. It also stated that America was aggressor that killed many Muslims.²²

F. Conclusion: the Future

Indonesians' perspectives on the United States are based on Indonesia's historical experience as a newly independent country dealing with a superpower. The United States would like to see Indonesia rapidly become a more liberal, modern, and democratic society, which, it is assumed, will be more conducive to U.S. interests. It also wants to see quick action taken to thwart corruption and the progress of terrorism. Some Indonesians, however, see U.S. pressure as a form of intervention in their internal affairs. Negative perceptions of the United States arise from the view that the United States conducts a double-standard policy in the Middle East that works to the disadvantage of Muslim interests. Some Muslim groups also believe that the use of force in Iraq, resulting in the deaths of many civilians, will intensify terrorist activities rather than end them.

Aside from these concerns, however, governments in many periods of both countries do share similar democratic values and common interests in Southeast Asia.²³

²¹ Tony Syarqi, *Presiden AS Pertama yang 100% Yahudi* (Jakarta: Jazera, 2010).

²² <http://www.suara-islam.com/news/tabloid/nasional/579-umat-islam-wajib-tolak-obama>

²³ A. Rabasa, A., and J. Haseman, *The military and democracy in Indonesia: Challenges, politics, and power*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, J., 2002. Retrieved October 28, 2004, from <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1599/>

The United States has played an important role in the history of Indonesia and has always cooperated in building a stable and peaceful region. These similarities can be used as the basis on which to build a better relationship in the future.

Indonesian perspectives on America represented by many concerned groups discussed above may not jeopardize Indonesia-Malaysia relations. Indeed, the negative perspectives to some America policies such as toward Afghanistan, Iran and Palestine in some occasions pushed the Indonesia government to take firm policies by criticizing America, but this does not influence the normal bilateral relations between the two countries. Indonesia government is also eager to show that it keeps implementing free and active foreign policy as the traditional guideline of foreign policy, although in many areas Indonesia depends and needs helps and economic aids from America. In the long run, however, people reactions and protests to America can increase anti-America sentiments which can inspire policies taken by Indonesia government toward America.

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