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## SHORT FEATURE

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# 2014 Election and Indonesia's Foreign Policy

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**W**HILE IT MAY BE too early to talk about implications of the new leadership in Indonesia to Indonesia's foreign policy, it is apparent that this important question has been aired by many due to Indonesia's current and prospective role in the region. Nonetheless, it is not an easy question to answer due to at least two reasons. *First*, very few parties have come up with clear foreign policy agenda to pursue should they win the election and become the ruling party. *Second*, the constituents pay greater focus on how the candidates would address the people's bread-and-butter issues. It implicates into the fact that foreign policy has never been an interesting topic to be campaigned by the candidates.

Before addressing that question, it is important to underline that the upcoming leaders/politicians should have a clear understanding of what challenges they will face ahead immediately after they reach the highest position in this country. Since Indonesia's position has been relatively better compared to when it came out of the political and economic

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crisis, Indonesia is now located right in the middle of the great powers competition. Domination of China will certainly intensify while other major countries trying to balance this rising to maintain their influence in Asia. Indonesia will also have to struggle with the increasing pressure of free trade as well as regional economic integration which may implicate to the greater push to open up its market for foreign goods and services. Finally, the Asian region will continuously struggle with conflict over resources that overlap with territorial conflicts which are hardly to settle in a short time.

It is certainly no surprise to find out the common message indicated in various statements made by the candidates that Indonesia needs to continue its independent and active foreign policy, free from being dictated and intervened by other countries, especially the big powers. Indonesia, due to its size and richness, should not be dependant to other countries. This nationalistic jargon/terminology has certainly been used over and over especially during this election period.

However, while all parties unanimously put forward this vision in the parties' agenda, platform, or the so-called manifesto, we hardly can find on 'how' they will conduct the foreign policy of this country. Again, it is fully understandable because foreign policy formulation certainly needs to be prepared seriously and cannot be instantly produced.

Interestingly, while emphasising on the need to pursue high economic growth and the people's welfare, the presidential candidate from Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Gerindra), for example, has made it clear from the beginning that he would like to implement a 'progressive' foreign policy in which Indonesia has to be equal with other major powers in the world. He even argued that Indonesia should not depend itself on the so-called 'ASEAN solidarity,' with reference to the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has proved to be absent when it clashes with national interests, taking the examples of the lost of Sipadan-Ligitan negotiation, Ambalat conflict, and the inability to impose extradition treaty with neighbouring countries. Foreign policy, according to him, "should serve our national interest on the basis of our own strength to decide by ourselves in order to fight for our own independence."

Partai Golkar, another example, presents its "Indonesia's Vision 2045" that emphasises on the steps on how to strengthen Indonesia's foundations in order to become a developed country, which is hoped to be fulfilled within 30 years from now. Other parties then tend to share this pattern in order to 'strengthen Indonesia's foreign policy', like in Nasional Demokrat

(Nasdem)'s platform to 'restore' Indonesia. Unfortunately, nothing can be found from the most promising party like Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP) in terms of foreign policy direction.

Nevertheless, business will likely run as usual. The new government will focus its first few years on domestic/internal consolidation, while foreign visits will be scheduled. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the new president will have to be ready shortly after he or she is inaugurated, to attend three major events, namely Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit, ASEAN and East Asia Summit (EAS), and the G-20.

Some candidates who clearly do not have the expertise in foreign policy issues will need some (though, unfortunately, not much) time to learn. However, this actually provides the opportunity for the experts outside the government to be given a significant role to give useful, and hopefully more objective, advice to the president. There is a big hope that such body – like National Security Council - will be institutionalized to assist the president in his/her foreign policy direction. In addition to this, there is also another hope that the new leadership will be able to come up with a clear blueprint or guideline of Indonesia's foreign policy, which would specifically elaborate what the national interests are.

Then, the real question is: Will there be any change or continuity in Indonesia's foreign policy? Despite some possibilities of unlikely surprises, there will likely not be any significant change in the course of Indonesia's foreign policy. Continuity will take place in foreign policy direction.

While continuity in this sense, especially to nurture its role as norm-setter in its democratic and human rights values, is very much well-expected, a certain level of change is desperately needed in the way foreign policy is being run. Indonesia needs to be more active in its role as mediator in conflicts, particularly those that threaten regional stability and national interests. Indonesia needs to be firmer with its agenda to pursue in its relations with major powers, while at the same time maintain good relations with them to create peace and stability.

In a nutshell, whoever the new leader is, they certainly have in mind that Indonesia, due to its size and geopolitical position, is entitled to play its role as a major world power in the future. Indonesia will continue to play its role in various regional and multilateral institutions and certainly to develop its soft power diplomacy, while probably waiting for its hard power to develop. Indonesia will continue to "export" its democratic experiences to other countries, making itself as a showcase on how democracy can live in the biggest Muslim-populated country in the world. Finally, the

most important thing is to indicate that the new leadership will not develop an unreasonable phobia against other countries while maintaining Indonesia's nationalism as well as intention to protect its sovereignty and equal existence with other countries.