

Indonesia-United States Bilateral Relations

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Speaking of relations between countries one should try to understand the basic interests underlying the relationship and ponder the philosophical, political, economic, socio-cultural as well as the strategic aspects of those relations.

With regard to Indonesia's relations with the United States, I would like to venture the following analysis in the hope of throwing light on the interests that bind both countries together, exposing differences that may stand in the way, and perhaps preparing to anticipate the future.

Indonesia has known the USA for a long period of time, even at a time when Indonesia was still a Dutch colony. One might even think that the colonial era had facilitated the contact and the process of understanding of the USA. In rather simplistic terms, Indonesia knows the USA through its products sold in the markets like electrical appliances, cars and machineries. In the field of culture American films and music were very popular among the Indonesian people. Indonesia's former leaders, most of whom enjoyed western education, were exposed to ideas and thinking propagated by American scholars and statesmen. They studied, understood and even admired the idealism behind the American Revolution and the philosophy underlying the Declaration of Independence. It is a public secret that when preparing Indonesia's state philosophy and constitution Indonesian leaders were also inspired by the ideals embodied in the American Declaration of Independence which stressed the importance of human dignity, freedom and democracy.

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Touching upon the period of Indonesia's independence struggle it is worth mentioning the important and active role the US had played in the Good Offices Committee set-up by the United Nations to mediate in the conflict between Indonesia and the Netherlands. The USA had also played a significant role in Indonesia's struggle to reintegrate Irian Jaya. The names of Frank Graham and Ellsworth Bunker are well remembered, while their contributions to Indonesia's national endeavour will never be forgotten.

In short, to the Indonesian people in general, the USA is not a stranger. They know the United States as a great country which upholds individual freedom and democracy, a country that abides by the principles of free trade and open markets. It is also known as a leader of the free world whose global strategy is aimed at preventing communist domination in the world.

Indonesia regained its independence on August 17, 1945. It enters a world which just saw the end of a global war. It was a world beset by uncertainties for the future, a world with many large areas completely devastated, a world impoverished materially and spiritually. The wartime alliance united and victorious in the war, was already breaking up, soon to polarise the world into a Western and an Eastern bloc, mutually hostile, and each crudely preserving its gains from the war, and making great efforts to expand its sphere of influence.

Indonesia, the new born state, faced formidable problems, both domestically and externally. At home, Indonesia had to start practically from scratch, the civil administration was almost completely disorganised, the economy shattered and there was no united and organised military force to speak of. All this was the legacy of colonialism and wartime occupation. While Indonesia was building up its internal apparatus, it also had to face formidable external problems. The major problem was of course the unwillingness of the former colonial masters to recognise the Republic. Being completely ignorant of the highest aspirations of the Indonesian people, and of the depth of feelings of a people wanting to be free, and the determination of the people to defend the freedom it had just regained, the Dutch government launched two colonial wars against the Republic.

It was very obvious then, that the first major task of Indonesia's foreign policy and diplomacy was to achieve full recognition of the new Republic of Indonesia. The second task was to find ways and means for Indonesia to chart a course in a world already divided in two power blocs, without prejudicing Indonesia's freedom and sovereignty, and to get the necessary assistance from the more developed countries to rebuild the nation.

Indonesia then developed a foreign policy called an independent and active foreign policy. Indonesia decided not to take sides automatically either to be pro the Western or pro the Eastern bloc. Indonesia has determined its position after considering its own national interest and the merits of each problem under consideration. Indonesia decided to participate actively in the efforts to solve world problems and to contribute to the maintenance of a durable peace based on freedom and justice. In short, Indonesia's foreign policy is anti colonialism, giving support to nations fighting for their freedom and independence; Indonesia's foreign policy is independent and active as already explained above. These characteristics of Indonesia's foreign policy have actually been incorporated in the preamble of Indonesia's Constitution.

To return to the relationship between Indonesia and the USA, from the very beginning Indonesia wanted friendly relations between the two countries. The USA itself gained independence through a war against a colonial power. Its active role in the Good Offices Committee, which was created by the United Nations to mediate between Indonesia and the Netherlands as mentioned above. As a big power and leader of the Western Bloc, the US was in the position to assist Indonesia in its economic reconstruction. Technical assistance for Indonesia's government officers in various fields was very important to Indonesia in building up her government apparatus. One can just count how many American educated and American trained officers Indonesia has in her government, both civilian and military. While in the field of trade and commerce the USA is one of Indonesia's major partners. In general one could say that the relationship between the two countries has been very good. Of course it also had its ups and downs. There was a period when the US Government did not appreciate an independent foreign policy, when the attitude in the USA was such that one should either be for or against someone; one is either a friend or an enemy. And Indonesia has at one time rejected an agreement under the MSA.

Again, when Indonesia tried to find a peaceful solution with the Netherlands over the Irian Barat problem, bilaterally and also through the United Nations, the US Government chose not to support Indonesia, but rather the Netherlands. It was at a later stage, that the US changed its attitude and did support Indonesia. However this was soon to be followed by opposing Indonesia in its policy vis-a-vis the creation of Malaysia. Of course the period of strained relations between Indonesia and the United States was exploited to the tilt by the PKI.

In this period, when the US was following a policy perceived as always opposing Indonesia, plus an apparent support by US agencies of a rebellion in Sumatra and Sulawesi, the Indonesian Government swayed more and more

towards the Eastern Bloc. While the US was opposing Indonesia in its various policies, the Soviet Union and its allies were giving support to Indonesia all along, including the supply of arms. By that time Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy was more leftist than independent. However after the Communist attempted coup in October 1965, this foreign policy was brought back to its intended path, a proof of how well Indonesia's founding fathers thought out and formulated this foreign policy. After Indonesia's foreign policy returned to its intended course, relationship between Indonesia and the USA was again improved.

The description elaborated at length on the development of Indonesia's foreign policy, was intended to illustrate Indonesia's strong determination to pursue her active and independent foreign policy, although that too has had its difficulties, showing some apparent inconsistencies due to the dictate of circumstances, both internal and external.

Indonesia's enchantment with and admiration for the great ideals of the American Revolution were occasionally clouded by her failure to understand American attitudes towards changes taking place in the world, where new or small nations are continuously struggling for a better place in the family of nations. However, new developments have taken place and are taking place, perceptions have changed, and so are the political and strategic equations, particularly in the Pacific Region.

The Vietnam war was over, although there are still some residual problems to be solved. The People's Republic of China is no longer an adversary of the United States, but has become a partner to co-operate with. Japan has become an economic giant, and is therefore an important power in its own right, which, in American opinion, should assume more responsibilities for the security and stability of the region. ASEAN has become one of the more successful regional organisations in the world. The ASEAN region is one of the fastest growing regions in the world like many other Pacific areas, and ASEAN's political cohesion has made it a political force which should be taken into consideration. The Pacific Region as a whole promises to become one of the most important trading areas in the world. These developments promise to open up an exciting era of co-operation among the Pacific countries, especially in the South and South-West Pacific.

However, apart from this exciting promise, there are also less desirable problems. The Kampuchea problem remains to be solved, after more than six years. Although it does not vitally hamper economic development and co-operation in Southeast Asia as a whole, it does however create an atmosphere of unease and tension, especially in the countries adjacent to the Indo-China

peninsula. The increasing presence of Soviet military forces in Vietnam, is another negative development, aggravating tension and possible big power rivalry in Southeast Asia, bringing a global problem closer to home for countries in Southeast-Asia.

Taking all the above developments and facts into consideration, one could then envisage the relations between Indonesia and the USA more or less as follows:

1. Both Indonesia and the USA are geographically situated in the Pacific Region. As such the two are bound to have contacts with each other and there should be an interaction between the respective national interests;
2. There are objective conditions and factors of a complementary nature between the two which could be exploited to the mutual benefit of both.
3. Although Indonesia and the US have different political systems, political outlook and perceptions and approaches to many world problems, there are enough areas of common interest which could be fruitfully expanded to the mutual benefit of both.

With these premises as guidance let me be more specific in presenting some aspects of the bilateral relations between Indonesia and the US. Politically the two countries enjoy at present very good relations. Contacts and dialogues between leaders of the two countries are increasing and create a deeper understanding of each other. Indonesia appreciates the US support on the issue of East Timor in various international forums. The country is still less than happy, however, by the persistent, often not well founded, criticism addressed to her from certain quarters in the US on the aspect of human rights. Indonesia also appreciates the position of the USA supporting ASEAN moves and initiatives on the problem of Kampuchea. Indonesia hopes that the involvement of the USA in the matter would facilitate the process of seeking a satisfactory solution to the problem. Indonesia's initiative supported by ASEAN to engage the US in a new strategic and political equation is an indication that Indonesia welcomes the presence of USA in her region in a peaceful and constructive way.

US presence in the area should not be construed as Indonesia's abandonment to the concept of ZOPFAN. On the contrary this should be regarded as an initial step toward its realisation. Co-operation between the two countries are bound to grow in intensity as both have embarked upon an important undertaking along the APC scheme. Indonesia can understand US strategic considerations for an increased US co-operation with the People's Republic of

China in its modernisation programme. However, Indonesia is still very wary about what the PRC could and would do after it achieves its goals of modernisation. Unfortunately Indonesia has had some bad experience with that country. It is Indonesia's hope that while the PRC is busily engaged in its modernisation, Indonesia would be able to strengthen its national resilience. Indonesia also hopes that the relationship between the USA and the PRC would also be a restraining factor for China in whatever negative ambitions it has towards Southeast Asia. If China could restrain itself from activities which could be interpreted as being hostile or dangerous by its neighbours then China could be accepted as a friend and partner and could thus contribute to the security and stability of the region.

Japan's growth into a world economic power should enable her to give more aid to the less developed countries. Such a great economic power could rightfully assume more political and military responsibilities in the region. However a greater military role by Japan, would increase tension in the North Pacific Region, because the USSR is bound to increase its military presence also; furthermore it will create misgivings in the countries in Southeast-Asia. All Southeast Asian countries are deeply concerned by a possible increased military role of Japan. The history of the war in the Pacific and three and a half years of Japanese wartime occupation of the countries in Southeast Asia are not yet forgotten.

In spite of the very good relations between Indonesia and the USA there are also differences which both should try to lessen or eliminate. Such differences are usually derived from differences in perceived national interest. Apart from the two issues mentioned earlier, there are problems of decolonisation and disarmament in the United Nations on which Indonesia and the USA find themselves on opposite sides.

There is however one issue which Indonesia regards as very important and vital to Indonesia, on which her policies differ. The US position on the Law of the Sea was taken by the present US administration to serve its particular perceived interest in deep seabed mining, in spite of the fact that the Convention of the Law of the Sea was drafted in co-operation with an American bipartisan delegation, so that everybody could have expected the US Administration to accept a Convention also drafted with American interests in mind.

While some 157 nations have accepted the Convention and some have even already ratified it, to their dismay, the USA rejected it, followed by a few developed countries. Indonesia is at the moment finalising the process of ratification of the convention. Indonesia hopes that within the foreseeable future, the US will review its position on this matter and accept the convention

as the only global legal framework for co-operation in maritime affairs. For the Pacific especially, such legal framework is very important because of the convergence of such world powers as the USA, USSR, Japan and the People's Republic of China in the region. Such an internationally agreed regime is of paramount importance to prevent the Pacific from becoming a new centre of disputes and conflicts.

There are still other issues which are not to be dealt with in depth at the moment as they will be discussed as special items later. Suffice it to say that whatever differences there may be between the two countries, these are derived from the different approaches and perceptions one has as to what constitutes one's national interest at the moment.

Turning to the relations in the economic field it is worthy of note that the general picture is not bleak. In several aspects it shows very positive developments.

Indonesia regards the US as an important source of technical assistance, capital, technology and skill it needs for its national development efforts. The USA is for Indonesia one of its traditional markets for its products and commodities. On the other hand, it is assumed that Indonesia can serve as a major supplier of a number of strategic materials for the USA as an area for substantial investment and as a potential trading partner. The overall economic achievement of Indonesia and the dynamic economies of a group of countries in the region are also important factors which could lead to the growth of economic relations between Indonesia and the USA.

US assistance to Indonesia given through the IGGI has been an important aspect of Indonesia-US bilateral relations. Since 1966 to April this year the amount of commitment in assistance and grant has reached US\$2,885.2 million.

This assistance, while highly appreciated, is a complement to the funds mobilised domestically, and Indonesia hopes that with the advance of her economy in the future this assistance can gradually be dispensed with.

Indonesia also welcomes the participation of US investment in the country. From the last record US is the third biggest investor in Indonesia with the amount of US\$1,021.4 million representing 6,8 per cent of the total foreign investment in Indonesia. Indonesia would of course like to have this participation increased.

On technical co-operation there seems to be no problem. The number of Indonesian trainees studying in US institutions is increasing. There are still difficulties with regard to shipping and air communications but these are not something insurmountable.

I could enumerate any more areas of co-operation in this economic field, but I would rather like to emphasise on some problems that both countries are still facing.

Most important of these is about protectionism. Indonesia is genuinely concerned with the strong current running in the States to put limitations on Indonesia's exports, especially on textiles. If the bill which has now been passed by the US Congress becomes law it will have a dire effect on Indonesia's textile industry employing about two million people, and industries affiliated to it. On the one hand this will cause additional unemployment which in turn may have a destabilising effect to political stability. On the other hand this measure will engender negative feelings toward the USA. This will be dealt with under a special item. The sincere hope of Indonesia is that the US administration will see fit to prevent the bill from becoming law.

As in the case of political relations Indonesia and USA also have different approaches to economic global issues discussed in various international forums. This different stands with regard to issues related to the New Economic World Order such as Global Negotiations, New Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations, North-South dialogue and others are facts which may put strains to the relations of both countries.

The reality of the world today shows that the majority of the members of the United Nations consists of developing countries still striving to improve their living conditions. They think that their present condition is the result of years of living under colonial exploitation and domination. They therefore feel that they have a right to some compensation.

To turn to other areas of relationship between the two countries it is worthwhile to note that in the social and cultural field encouraging developments have taken place. Contacts and exchange of visits promote better understanding between both peoples. The conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding on "Co-operation in the Field of Natural and Cultural History and Conservation" in 1984 between Indonesia and the Smithsonian Institute has opened a new perspective in the socio-cultural relations between the two countries.

I for one have a strong conviction that better understanding in the field of culture will eliminate psychological barriers and prejudices which in most cases are caused by different cultural and social backgrounds.

In the military field Indonesia and the US also have a good record of co-operation though rather limited in nature. Indonesia is still sending officers for training and specialisation to the USA under the IMET programme. Indonesia also obtains certain types of military hardware through Foreign Military Sales procedures.

If co-operation in this field is rather limited this is perhaps an indication that gradually Indonesia can cope with her own need and wants to be less dependent on foreign assistance.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The present day relationship between Indonesia and the United State is quite good. It had its periods of ups and downs in the past but it has consistently been moving to a more positive direction.
2. There are still differences in the perception and approaches of both the countries to regional as well as global issues due to differences in the interests and different strategic perceptions of both countries. Some of the differences remain unbridgeable, but this should not stand in the way of active interchange relations and co-operation between both countries.
3. Frequent contacts and dialogues and exposure to the other's thinking and way of life will promote a better understanding and help prevent the taking of actions detrimental to each other's interest.
4. In economic matters, the USA as a superpower is expected for some time to come to accept the legitimate demands of Indonesia for an asymmetrical, non-reciprocal and preferential treatment, until it is strong enough to deal with the USA on a more equal basis.
5. The future of the world, especially the Pacific Region, generates conditions that dictate closer co-operation between Indonesia and the USA. Indonesia and the USA should be able to work together to their mutual benefit and for lasting peace and stability in the region.