SBY’s TRIP AND AUSTRALIA-INDONESIA RELATIONS: A QUALITATIVE CHANGE?

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Background and plan of the talk

- Provide some flavour of the excitement surrounding SBY's trip, esp. the address to the Australian (Oz) parliament
  - A new chapter in bilateral relations, or mostly spin?
  - Trying to make some sense of what things have changed and what remains the same
Tentative conclusion: yes, the relationship has changed qualitatively (irreversably?) in the past few years

- No longer just about containing conflict and building ballast
Plan of the talk

- The SBY visit: highlights (as I saw them)
- 2. Context: historical, developments and hard data
- 3. Conclusions: opportunities, constraints and vulnerabilities
Some disclaimers

- Out of my comfort zone – not an IR expert
- Not party to “g to g” discussions
- Mainly dealing with Australian perceptions and reactions
I. CAPTURING SOME OF THE FLAVOUR OF THE TRIP

- “A refreshingly frank address..one of a statesman” (Australian)
- “Historic and frank address..” (SMH)
- Paul Kelly (Australian): “Yudoyono came as a symbol of democracy. He got the balance right between realism and optimism. And he spoke with a frankness only possible as a friend. ..It is impossible to imagine a more pro-Australian President”.
Highlights: from SBY

- Eloquence and capacity to relate to the Aussie audience
- Generous gestures of sympathy with the Balibo 5
- People smugglers to be made a criminal offense
- Moving beyond stereotypes
Joint communique: more about process

- Regular annual meetings of the two leaders
- An annual leadership dialogue between prominent individuals
- Greater cooperation on climate change

SBYS effort to encourage of more business contacts: address to business leaders in Sydney March 11.
Disappointments

- Rudd’s intransigence on the travel warnings
- SBY’s
  - Cool attitude to the Asia Pacific idea
  - Discussions of an FTA put on hold – a subtle move to an “economic partnership”
Media assessments in Australia not all positive

- “No news is good news” (AFR)
- Sheridan (Australian): “feel-good show lacking depth.. on all issues that vex [menggangu] Australian-Indonesia relations”
  - The FTA, prisoner exchange, criminalizing people smuggling, poor record on Oz on Indonesian language and studies
- But: his sympathetic interview with Marty N.
III. THE LONGER TERM PERSPECTIVE

Historical context (see Jamie Mackie)

- Coming off a long term low
  - From both perspectives: East Timor in 1999 a low point in relations
  - From Indonesian side: vulnerability at the time of and after the crisis, and heightened suspicion of the west
  - From Australian side: terrorism and the Bali bombings, and the rise of political Islam in the wake of September 11.
But positive developments since Timor

- Cooperation in the search for and capture of terrorists
- Australian support over Aceh
  - Huge increase in the amount and broadening of the scope of Australian aid to Indonesia
- Signing of the Lombok treaty of cooperation and consultation
- Much more intensive G to G consultation and cooperation – Ministerial forums and visits more than just pro-forma
- More intensive cooperation in regional fora
- Economic relationship weak and not growing much
  - Bilateral trade and investment small
  - Tourism not expand much, depends on ebb and flow of politics (and the exchange rate!)
IV. SUMMING UP

- **Opportunities**
  - Greater Indonesian interest in the bilateral relationship

- **Constraints**
  - Main strategic and economic interests elsewhere

- **Vulnerabilities**
  - Illegal migration and people smuggling
  - Terrorism in Indonesia and fear of radical Islam
  - Australian support for Papuan ‘separatists’