4 GREAT, BUT UNFOCUSED
INDONESIAN ASSESSMENTS OF U.S. POWER

Ernest Z. Bower

Indonesians, like citizens of other Southeast Asian nations, perceive American power to be in decline relative to a rising China, yet they generally believe the United States will retain its role as the world's preeminent power for the next several decades. More salient are Indonesian concerns about U.S. engagement—that is, that the U.S. focus on Southeast Asia is inconsistent, whether the United States is powerful or not. The uneven attention paid by Washington generates unvoiced fears of abandonment and, to a lesser degree, entrapment.

Even though it is the fourth-largest country in the world and the largest in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) by a factor of more than two, Indonesia feels caught between the United States and China. Like citizens of all Southeast Asian nations, Indonesians emphasize that they do not want to be asked to choose between the United States and China. Unlike other some others in Southeast Asian countries, however, Indonesian elites have a clear preference for American as opposed to Chinese preeminence. Like its ASEAN neighbors, Indonesia does not want to "be like" China; in other words, China has little soft power in ASEAN countries. However, China's economic dynamism and pragmatic approach to regional economic integration make it a useful and necessary economic partner.

Indonesia views China as a competitor because of the geography of the region, the inevitable struggle for similar markets and investors, and the fact that Indonesia considers itself the only "big country" in Southeast Asia. In this context, perceptions of U.S. power are an important factor in Indonesian strategic calculations, providing reassurances that it is safe and helpful for Indonesia to counter, even if subtly, Chinese attempts to dictate the agenda in ASEAN-related forums such as ASEAN Plus One, ASEAN Plus Three, and the East Asia Summit (EAS). This is significant because Indonesia will chair ASEAN and the EAS in 2011 and is self-consciously returning to its role as the leading voice in Southeast Asia.

Indonesia is the least likely of the ASEAN countries, after Vietnam, to pursue policies of accommodation with China. This does not mean it will necessarily run into an American embrace. Indonesian concerns about U.S. power, combined with a more learned mistrust of U.S. commitment to the country and the region, encourage Indonesians to guard against "entrapment" or going too far with the Americans and not being supported after making external commitments based on perceived U.S. support. In other words, Indonesia will use hedging to protect its image of independence and of being a leader of less-developed countries, and it will work to avert perceptions of its being overcommitted to the United States.

The author thanks Aaron Connelly for research assistance.

Indonesians have historically characterized their foreign policy as "independent and active," a formulation that led it to pioneer the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War era of the 1950s. Though not always true to this vision, for Indonesia it is the default position. As a result, Indonesian policymakers require strong assurances of U.S. power and presence to commit to partnership with the United States.

This dichotomy explains the result in the 2009 CSIS survey on Asian regionalism, in which 65 percent of Indonesian elites responded that they believed that China would be the "strongest in overall national power in ten years *in the Asian region*."[1] This did not indicate their confidence in Chinese leadership: more Indonesian respondents, 29 percent, than in any other country indicated that China was the "greatest threat to regional peace and stability."[2] A plurality, 46 percent, responded that the bilateral relationship with China would be the most important relationship in ten years. Only 23 percent indicated that the U.S. relationship would be most important.[3] Indonesian elites like the idea of U.S. engagement in the region and dislike the thought of a dominant Chinese role, but they have far more confidence in the Chinese commitment to the region than they do in the U.S. commitment.

1. Bates Gill, Michael Green, Kiyoto Tsuji, and William Watts, *Strategic Views on Asian Regionalism: Survey Results and Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, February 2009), p. 15.
2. Ibid., p. 18.
3. Ibid., p. 16.

Methodology

Indonesian foreign-policy making, despite democratization, remains the province of the Indonesian elite. As a result, this report focuses on their views. The observations in this report are based on interviews with Indonesian elites attached to the State Palace, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Trade, and the Indonesian Chamber of Industry; think tank and civil society leaders; and leaders in locally and foreign-owned businesses with influence over government policy. Discussions with those close to the Islamic leadership groups in Indonesia supplemented these observations. Quantitative measures are based on polling conducted by CSIS and the Pew Research Center. Additional insight was gleaned from newspaper reports, editorials, and opinion columns written in English and Indonesian, particularly from *Kompas*, *Tempo*, the *Jakarta Post*, and the *Jakarta Globe*.

It is important to stress that, because of Indonesian norms of consensus and the continuing dearth of strong institutions charged with the examination of foreign policy, foreign-policy making in Indonesia is less sophisticated or structured than in Asia's industrialized states. There are few identifiable "camps" in debates on foreign policy, and as a result there are fewer lines of demarcation that can be drawn in those debates. Consensus on issues such as U.S. power and presence emerges through a long and irregular process of dialogue among many actors. Policy is then forged out of that consensus through the leadership of the president of the republic.

This paper begins with some important background on Indonesian perceptions of U.S. power and presence. The next two sections outline where the consensus on these issues stands today and where the benchmarks for determinations regarding U.S. leadership will occur. Next, the analysis disaggregates the consensus according to various institutional perspectives. Finally, the paper explores the implications for U.S. policy.

Background

Indonesia is the world's fourth-largest country. It is arguably Southeast Asia's most influential country. Its population is more than twice the size of the next closest member of ASEAN, and it has the region's largest economy. Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, and people's religious lives are dominated by a predominantly moderate and personalized version of Islam. It is also the world's third-largest democracy after India and the United States.

Indonesia does not perceive the United States to be as important as other nations in Southeast Asia perceive the United States to be. This is in part because Indonesia is generally less integrated into the international economic and financial system than many of its Southeast Asian neighbors. Its large population means Indonesia has a large domestic consumption base, so it is not as dependent on exports or foreign markets for GDP growth as other countries are. Although trade amounts to more than 300 percent of GDP in Singapore and nearly 200 percent of GDP in Malaysia, trade is less than 30 percent of Indonesia's GDP. Because of its large domestic market, Indonesia is one of only a few economies to sustain economic growth throughout the most recent worldwide economic crisis. Moreover, its population is relatively nonmobile. Although some Indonesians are lured abroad for schooling, at the high end, or for remittances, at the low end, they tend not to stay away for long. Few permanent Indonesian expatriate communities exist abroad, especially compared with those of other countries such as the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, or China.

The New Order under Suharto

U.S. power has not translated to real engagement in Indonesia since the 1980s. After the Cold War, at the apex of U.S. global dominance, U.S. foreign policy was perceived by Indonesians as inconsistent, unfocused, and even tone deaf. While U.S. investment in Indonesia climbed steadily and Indonesian students began to flood into the United States, America's Indonesia policy was dominated by issues the Indonesians saw as highly sensitive yet peripheral to their country's priorities, namely separatist movements and related human rights concerns in Aceh and East Timor. This led to a decoupling of private interest in U.S. society, which remained high, and public interest in U.S. policies, which declined.[4]

The U.S. Congress passed human rights legislation that severed the close links that the U.S. military had established with the Indonesian military since the ascendance of President Suharto.[5] The Pentagon and the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) were forced to disengage, beginning a nearly 20-year period of little to no contact between the U.S. military and the military of Southeast Asia's largest country.

At the end of the 1990s—as the Asian financial crisis ravaged Indonesia and shattered the lives of families by decimating savings, eliminating jobs, and closing off opportunities for advancement at all levels—President Suharto and his government fell. This should have been a watershed moment for U.S. foreign policy in Indonesia and the opportunity for Southeast Asia's largest country to move from a centrally controlled military dictatorship toward democracy. Unfortunately, the U.S. response to the financial crisis was seen as cold, sterile, lacking compassion, and underlining Indonesian suspicions that "the Americans don't really know us"; thus, an important opportunity was lost.

An iconic photograph of the managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Michel Camdessus, standing smugly over a hunched and defeated President Suharto as he signed a major agreement in 1998 with the IMF, which was understood to be closely aligned with Washington, represented for many elite Indonesians this perceived lack of compassion and lack of respect with which the United States handled the crisis.[6]

The Chinese Charm Offensive

As Indonesians forged ahead to create a democracy, they did so with mixed feelings about the United States. On the one hand, they were inspired by Jeffersonian ideals and the courage and vision of great U.S. leaders like John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King; on the other hand, they could taste the bitter pill of perceived U.S. indifference to the worst financial crisis in the nation's history.[7]

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4. Ali Alatas, the late Indonesian foreign minister; A. R. Ramly, former Indonesian ambassador to the United States; and Arifin Siregar, former Indonesian ambassador to the United States, interviews with author.

5. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and former senator Russ Feingold (D-Wis.) were key drivers of legislation prohibiting the U.S. military from engaging the Indonesian Armed Forces.

6. Though Camdessus is not an American, Indonesians closely associate the IMF with the "Washington consensus" and U.S. policy.

7. During the Asian financial crisis from 1997 to 2000, the percentage living in poverty in Indonesia moved from less than 12 percent to more than 50 percent, savings were depleted by an estimated 70 percent, and the rupiah was devalued from 2,500 to 14,500 to the U.S. dollar.

It was precisely at this moment that the People's Republic of China transformed its profile and perception in the region from that of a stodgy ideological giant to a newly empowered neighbor, ready and willing to help. China provided—for the first time—financial assistance to beleaguered ASEAN nations, including Indonesia. The Chinese charm offensive in Southeast Asia had officially begun.

China has made surprising inroads considering the history of mistrust and racial tension between Indonesia and its ethnic Chinese population, and Indonesia and the Chinese Communist Party. Although Chinese Indonesians have always suffered under suspicion and ethnic chauvinism in Indonesia, the situation worsened when Suharto came to power on the back of a failed coup attempt by communists.

Suharto's supporters set out to purge the country of alleged communists, a move that unleashed spasms of violence against Chinese Indonesians—most of whom were not, in fact, communists.[8] Importation of any Chinese-language writings or recordings was prohibited until 1999. As part of Suharto's ensuing effort to forge a cohesive national identity, his regime ordered Chinese Indonesians to adopt Indonesian names. Many did, and the Chinese community recovered its place in the country's leadership by rebuilding business empires and supplying a corps of loyal academics and technocrats to Suharto's governments.

As a result, cultural and political obstacles to China's influence in Indonesia are far greater than the obstacles to U.S. influence. China's size and proximity have caused the Indonesian system to produce natural antibodies to its influence in the region. Chinese investment, while welcome, often comes with kickbacks for senior officials, and low-interest loan packages require projects be built by Chinese companies and workers. This approach has generated resentment in Indonesia.

The Obama Era

The election of Barack Obama as president of the United States—the first U.S. president to have lived in Indonesia—and Indonesia's transition to democracy are coincident events that have refocused Indonesians on the United States. While the Obama administration clearly plans to take advantage of this window of opportunity to elevate and transform the relationship through presidential focus and a new comprehensive partnership, it has just begun to seize the momentum and fully engage Indonesia.

President Obama set out plans to visit Indonesia three times before finally making the trip for a brief 22 hours in November 2010. For Indonesians, the message sent by the postponements was clear—"You are not particularly important to the United States, even with Barack Obama as president."—but President's Obama's short visit in November 2010 was well received by most Indonesian elites. It will take time to find out whether Indonesians will alter their perspective of U.S. engagement and staying power. For now, there is a sense that the jury is out, and there is clearly hope that the president's visit turns out to be a historic inflection point after which genuine alignment of U.S. and Indonesian interests and values will be explored and promoted.

At this juncture, U.S. policy has still not closed the gap between the relative indifference of Indonesians toward the United States at the policy level and the personal interest in an America led by Barack Obama and what the United States represents.

8. The Indonesian Communist Party, the PKI, was averse to including ethnic Chinese Indonesians because the party did not want to be seen as a foreign fifth column, but as an indigenous group.

Measures of U.S. Power

Military

In terms of military power, the United States is seen as strong and forward deployed. The leadership of the U.S. military in the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief effort following the 2004 tsunami reminded Indonesian elites that forward-deployed U.S. power in Asia is a public good that fundamentally contributes to the security of Indonesians. Moreover, the speed and efficiency of the response impressed Indonesian foreign policy elites. The relief effort helped rehabilitate the image of the U.S. military in the Indonesian popular imagination. Although that rehabilitation was short-lived among the broader population, the positive impression left with Indonesian foreign policy elites has remained.

Unlike other ASEAN countries, Indonesia perceives itself as large country that merits a higher level of respect and engagement than it engenders, and that conveys the perception of the need for military engagement. When the United States is not forthcoming with that level of engagement, it is often interpreted—if not as a lack of power—as a lack of commitment to the region.

To ensure that the United States has strong alignment with ASEAN as new regional security architecture is established in the form of the EAS and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM +) forums, U.S. policy has recognized the strategic imperative of reestablishing military ties with Indonesia. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates and the U.S. Department of Defense have worked with the State Department to initiate that effort, with good results thus far.

A key challenge in that regard was recently overcome when Secretary Gates visited Jakarta in July 2010 to reestablish training programs and channels of communication with Kopassus, the elite special operations forces unit of the Indonesia military. U.S. legislation had prevented the Pentagon from engaging Kopassus for decades because of human rights concerns. To move forward, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and the Indonesia military had to commit to significant reforms in Kopassus. This step was fundamental to enhancing military ties between the United States and Indonesia. It creates an opportunity to enhance perceptions of U.S. military power in Indonesia as well as to build closer U.S.-Indonesia security ties. Should serious human rights abuses come to light in the future, however, Indonesian discipline and U.S. commitment will be tested. This dynamic has already been tested in the case of Indonesian military officers caught on videotape allegedly torturing West Papuan suspected separatists. The Indonesian military court has sentenced four military personnel to prison terms for their involvement in the incident.

Culture

The influence of U.S. culture on Indonesian culture remains powerful. Knowledge of English is seen as a requirement for entry into the elite. Successful new cable news channels catering to this audience often host full shows or bulletins in English to enhance the prestige of the channel. U.S. television shows and films are readily available to young people via pirated entertainment media. In addition, U.S. models for social media and networking have caught on in Indonesia. Indonesia is among the top three countries in the world for Facebook and Twitter users.

Historically, the Indonesian elites' understanding of and positive disposition toward the United States was a function of its technocratic leadership's education in U.S. universities and

educational institutions. During the last 12 years, unfortunately, the number of Indonesians studying in the United States fell by more than 50 percent, from 15,000 to approximately 7,000, whereas in comparison the number of Indonesians now studying at Al-Azhar University in Egypt is nearly 6,500. The Asian financial crisis forced many Indonesian students to return home or go to other markets such as Australia, Egypt, and China. These trends were exacerbated by U.S. immigration and visa policies after the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. Although efforts are under way to reverse these trends within the new Comprehensive Partnership and in other forums, the prospect of a generation of elite Indonesians who have never experienced the dynamism of the United States and thus gained a better understanding of its strength is one of the more unfortunate consequences of the "lost decade" between 1998 and 2008.

Economics

Indonesians are concerned about the U.S. economy and the seemingly protracted yet still uncertain efforts on the part of the United States to move into a sustained recovery. Indonesian elites believe that the domestic focus of the United States, revealed in a particularly unfortunate manner by the last-minute postponement of President Obama's state visit in March 2010 in order to shepherd through his health care legislation, represents a diminished interest and capability to manage its affairs abroad. Indonesians fear that their hoped-for elevation of bilateral relations under the Obama administration may be delayed or shelved as a result of further political upheaval resulting from this U.S. focus on domestic affairs.

There is also concern about the lack of U.S. leadership on trade, which is being perceived as a possible prelude to protectionism in the current economic climate. Recent World Trade Organization judgments finding for U.S. interests against key Indonesian industries, such as pulp and tobacco, have done little to reverse the perception that a somewhat weaker United States would use the multilateral trading system to protect its markets.

Indonesia hopes to attract more U.S. investment and wants the United States to participate in the development of priority sectors such as education and infrastructure. There is more suspicion and concern around financial markets and health care although increasing engagement and progress under the Comprehensive Partnership will alleviate concerns in these areas.

Statecraft

A significant number of Indonesians—both Muslims and non-Muslims—deeply empathize with the plight of the Palestinian people. The issue sharply focuses Indonesians on questions of U.S. power. Indonesians hope that the United States can help resolve the issue by using its leverage to secure Israeli government concessions in the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Indonesians believe that the United States is the most powerful country in the world, but that it is unwilling or unable to deploy that power in support of an enduring settlement in the Middle East.

Indonesians say that this is the issue that undercuts the positive impact of President Obama's efforts to reach out to the Muslim world, particularly since his speech at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. They believe U.S. policy on Israel and Palestine is hypocritical and, as a result, undermines the trust between the Jakarta and Washington. Many Indonesian elites privately commented that if President Obama had followed through on his planned visit to Indonesia in June 2010, shortly after Israeli troops clashed violently with passengers on board the *Mavi Marmara*, his trip would

have been dominated by expressions of Indonesian frustration and outrage over the Israel-Palestine situation.

Benchmarks for U.S. Engagement

The pattern of occasional U.S. neglect alternating with promises of reengagement has made Indonesians particularly adamant that the United States commit to the country in a visible way. Substantial visits to the country by important U.S. leaders such as President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton meet this test. Attendance in the various forums of ASEAN such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and now the EAS, which President Yudhoyono will host in 2011, is considered mandatory for U.S. leaders. Failure to show up for both bilateral visits and the regular schedule of summitry generates the all-too-familiar fears of abandonment. It is only fair to note here that President Yudhoyono failed to attend the last U.S. ASEAN Leaders' Meeting hosted by President Obama in New York in late September 2010. Privately, members of the Indonesian elite say that Yudhoyono could not have attended after President Obama failed to follow through on three planned visits to Jakarta. That decision was augmented by the perceived lateness of the invitation and the fact the meeting was scheduled to be held on the margins of the United Nations meetings instead of in Washington.

Indonesian calculations regarding America's appetite to use its power in Asia in ways relevant to Indonesia will be tested by the U.S. commitment to developing Asian architecture and its follow-through on Secretary Clinton's assertion of U.S. interests in the South China Sea.

South China Sea

The U.S. commitment to maintain freedom of navigation and its support for a multilateral resolution of disputed claims in the South China Sea based on international law are important indicators of U.S. commitment to the region. Indonesia has a significant interest in U.S. engagement to balance China's aggressive claims of sovereignty. Indonesia is one of the "claimant" countries in the South China Sea and has significant interest in developing oil and gas reserves in and around disputed waters. Indonesia has a focused interest in the Natuna Sea, where it and its commercial partners have identified tens of billions of dollars worth of potential gas and oil resources.

Secretary of State Clinton's intervention on the South China Sea at the ARF meeting in Hanoi in July 2010 was important to Indonesia. Her remarks stating U.S. interest in keeping the rights of navigation open and in seeing disputes resolved on a multilateral basis in accordance with international law were another reminder that effective U.S. power can be used to balance a China that is clearly viewing Southeast Asia as a region coming under its influence.

Indonesia is carefully watching the United States and looking for it to follow through on its commitment to the South China Sea issue. In that context, recent trips by Secretary Clinton, Secretary of Defense Gates, and President Obama have underlined continued U.S. commitment to the region, significantly raising perceptions of U.S. power. These perceptions continue to be somewhat undercut by concerns about the U.S. ability to pay for a sustained forward-deployed military presence in Asia and atavistic fears that the United States will change its focus away from Asia.

If the United States steps back, Indonesians will see the move as another chapter in U.S. inconsistency, and trust will be seriously undermined.

Regional Institutions

ASEAN is the foundation for newly developing security architecture in Asia, which includes the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting + 8 (ADMM + 8), the ARF, and the EAS. Indonesia is ASEAN's largest member and will chair the organization in 2011. Indonesia is also a member of APEC and the only ASEAN member in the Group of 20. It is also a significant leader in the Organization of Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement. Indonesian influence in emerging regional architecture will thus be significant. Its impact can be understood by looking at concentric circles of power starting with ASEAN.

During last summer's negotiations over the admission of new members to the EAS, Indonesia was a strong supporter of the campaign within ASEAN to have the United States admitted as a full member. This movement, led by Vietnam and Indonesia, defeated a Singaporean initiative to convene a separate, expanded meeting that would have been known as the EAS + 2. This was an effort on Indonesia's part to anchor the United States in regional institutions.

If the United States, having joined the EAS, fails to participate at the leader level, U.S. credibility in Southeast Asia will be undermined, as will U.S. capacity to drive or influence priority issues ranging from trade to security to transnational issues in regional organizations.

Variation among Indonesian Institutions

Government Institutions

The government, currently led by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, includes a variety of actors influential in foreign policy. The president and his closest advisers, generally referred to collectively as the Istana Negara, or State Palace, are the most influential of these.

The president is personally fond of the United States, having spent two tours of duty at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, during his time in the armed forces. In 2003, he told the *International Herald Tribune,* "I love the United States, with all its faults. I consider it my second country." Many of his advisers, most importantly the current ambassador to the United States, Dino Patti Djalal, who remains a close confidant of the president, likewise have strong ties to the United States and proclaim fondness of the country.[9] Despite these ties, the Istana shares the broader Indonesian concerns regarding U.S. economic strength and how it will affect the level of U.S. engagement in the region.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Indonesia's intelligence agency are the only Indonesian government institutions that possess the capacity to think strategically about foreign affairs independent of current leadership. Indonesian diplomats in the Department of Foreign Affairs are among the most convinced of and concerned by perceived U.S. decline relative to a rising China. Led by Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa, the former permanent representative at the United Nations, the department has assumed since the turmoil of the late 1990s that it would need to engage both the United States and Russia in order to protect Indonesia from a potentially aggressive

9. Ambassador Dino served as the presidential spokesman on foreign affairs during Yudhoyono's first term in office, but in fact acted as his chief adviser on the subject. His nomination to be the ambassador was vigorously opposed by the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), an Islamist party, because its leaders thought him to be too close to U.S. government officials and too fond of the United States.

China. The department maintains some of the closest ties to regional powers outside the U.S.-China dyad, especially Russia, Japan, and Australia.

The Department of Trade is led at the time of publication by the Berkeley-educated economist Mari Pangestu. Although she is the only member of the cabinet of Chinese ethnicity, Trade Minister Mari is another friend of the United States. Despite the expansion of trade and investment with China during her tenure, particularly through the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement, this is the product of a disinterested attempt to expand trade ties wherever they are available, not strategic interests. Other leaders, such as the chairman of the Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM), Gita Wirjawan, also want to expand linkages with the United States based on their personal experience and vision for their country.

The Indonesian legislature has made halting attempts at involvement in foreign affairs since Indonesia became a democracy. Through Commission I, which is responsible for foreign affairs, security affairs, and telecommunications, it has forced government policy changes on two sets of issues: those relating to the welfare of Muslims around the world, and those relating to democratic rights in the region and particularly in Myanmar. Its members have regularly insisted that the government take a stronger stand against U.S. policy in the Middle East and against the junta in Myanmar.

Nongovernmental Institutions

Indonesian business elites, as some of the best educated and most influential members of society, play an important role in Indonesian policymaking. Members of this group are well aware of the depth of the global financial crisis and its effects on the U.S. economy and are genuinely concerned about the ability of the United States to maintain a leadership position in the region until it recovers. They also generally agree that the U.S. system is by nature adaptable and, although it will take time, the United States will make the changes needed to regain its leadership role. While interested in the opportunities presented for investment by a rising China, they are wary of what sort of influence China might eventually want to wield in Indonesia and in ASEAN. Again, there is a sense of preference for U.S. engagement and investment, which is seen to bring with it high levels of training, education, community investment, and opportunities for Indonesians. Chinese and Indian investors have not followed similar models; they have usually pursued a more mercantilist approach.

Muslim civil society organizations are more wary of the United States. The two largest organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, pay particular attention to events elsewhere in the Islamic world. They have been universally disappointed by what they perceive as a lack of change in U.S. policies toward the Middle East since the election of President Obama, noting after his most recent speech in Jakarta that rhetoric would not be enough to win them over. Israeli attacks on Gaza in recent years have led to particularly harsh words for the United States. The inability of the United States to bring about peace in the Middle East reflects poorly on U.S. influence in Indonesia.

Indonesians are less clear in their impressions of U.S. engagement in Afghanistan. Megawati Sukarnoputri, the president of Indonesia from mid-2001 until late 2004, was the first foreign leader to visit the United States after 9/11, and Indonesians, along with most Southeast Asian countries, supported U.S. determination to track down the source of the terrorist attacks. Indonesians, having been victimized repeatedly in their capital of Jakarta and in Bali, share a common interest

in defeating terrorism. Indonesian elites are well aware that many radicalized Islamists in Indonesia terror cells have either trained in Afghanistan or had contact and training from others who have trained there. Indonesian elites tend to believe sustained military engagement by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq is draining U.S. resources, and they wonder about the wisdom of extending a large presence in Afghanistan. In general, a consensus view is that the United States should focus on ensuring its economic recovery and reduce its presence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Implications for Policy

One of the initial foreign policy objectives of the Obama administration was to transform the U.S.-Indonesia relationship, much as the Bush administration did with India. It had good reason to believe it could achieve this goal—a president who grew up in Jakarta and spoke some Bahasa Indonesia and a newly democratic Indonesia seeking a larger role in regional and global politics.

Good intentions have yet to translate into policy, but the infrastructure is in place and the window of opportunity is still open. President Obama's visit to Indonesia in November 2010 was effective. The launch of the new Comprehensive Partnership with Indonesia was warmly welcomed by Indonesian elites. That effort, combined with Secretary Gates's commitment to reestablish military-to-military ties and a more focused U.S. engagement in ASEAN, could augur well for Indonesian perceptions of U.S. power and the U.S.-Indonesia relationship.

The Comprehensive Partnership approach to elevating the Indonesia relationship should allow policies to focus on the interests and aspirations of young Indonesians. Getting alignment right in this area is fundamental to rebuilding trust and strengthening perceptions of U.S. power and presence in Indonesia.

Reengaging the Indonesian military is vital to building a sense of equity in Indonesia for a continued strong U.S. security presence in Asia. Trust and defining common goals and shared interests with Indonesia are also necessary to ensuring the ability of the United States to participate effectively and contribute to the emerging trade and security infrastructure in Asia. Without alignment between Indonesia and the United States, China or others will be able to pursue divide-and-conquer strategies on important issues such as the South China Sea.

If the United States fails to seize the window of opportunity to change Indonesian perceptions and enhance relations, there will be a serious impact on the ability of the United States to project its power and influence in Asia, especially through ASEAN-based regional architecture.

Indonesia is a rising Asian power. As a new democracy, it will surely face serious challenges as the politically empowered population struggles with institutions weakened by years of autocratic rule. Recent lessons from Thailand demonstrate the bloody danger of the failure of weak institutions to adjudicate political confrontation in nascent democracies. Indonesia could face such challenges as early as its next national elections in 2014.

Conclusion

Indonesia sees the United States as the world's most powerful country militarily and economically. U.S. soft power is also surprisingly pervasive in Indonesia. Although U.S. power is perceived to be in relative decline compared with China's rise, Indonesia has a vested interest in encouraging the

United States to sustain its economic and military strength in Asia to balance China. Indonesians, however, are frustrated by U.S. policy and the inconsistent use of U.S. power in issues related to Indonesia or that Indonesia believes are priorities. If Indonesia perceives a continued lack of focus by the United States, frustrations may eventually transform Indonesia into a competitor on certain issues.

Indonesia is an important country whose influence in regional and global politics is increasing. Its perceptions of U.S. power have been skewed by perceptions of U.S. indifference and historical mistrust. At a personal level, Indonesians admire the United States and the freedom it represents. Unfortunately, the last two decades have not encouraged U.S.-Indonesian alignment of interests.

There is now an opportunity to transform the U.S.-Indonesia relationship. A U.S. president raised in Jakarta, a newly democratic Indonesia, and an increasingly aggressive rising China provide the context for developing a partnership built on the shared aspirations of Americans and Indonesians. Rebuilding trust based on cooperation in areas such as education, governance, rule of law, and economic empowerment will create a foundation that is a necessary condition for enduring U.S. engagement in Asia for the next several decades.