

understanding Indonesia

Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee is examining Australia's relationship with Indonesia. Dougal McInnes says developing a better understanding of our neighbour will take time, but it will be time well spent.

Speaking in Canberra recently, Professor Amein Rais—Speaker of Indonesia's People's Consultative Assembly and 2004 presidential aspirant—likened the consolidation of Indonesian democracy to the pendulum of a clock. During the Suharto regime, the pendulum swung too far right. Now, under President Megawati, it has moved leftwards with the transition to democracy. Ironically, the pendulum may well need to move rightwards again as hard decisions need to be made. At any rate, the image of the pendulum highlights the key ingredient of time in Indonesia's struggle towards democratic government.

For Australia, the opportunities stemming from a stable Indonesia and robust Indonesian-Australian relations are great. As the 2003 Foreign Affairs and Trade White Paper notes, Indonesia is Australia's tenth largest export market and eighth largest foreign direct investor. Trade between the two neighbours totals more than A\$7 billion per year.

By the same token, an unstable Indonesia and strained Indonesian-Australian relations is potentially damaging. The Bali and, to a lesser extent, Marriott Hotel bombings have added greater urgency to the need for stability and better relations. Indeed, Indonesian-Australian relations have been under constant pressure from a troubled past. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the 1998 fall of Suharto and the Australian-led



INTERFET operation into East Timor in 1999 have all impacted on relations.

Stemming from these events, several observations capture the current state of Australian-Indonesian relations. First, public support within Australia for the relationship has never been very strong. Secondly, the Indonesian-Australian relationship is grounded on the necessity of overlapping interests and geography, rather than overtly shared values. And

thirdly, the current period of change is a tremendous opportunity for a new beginning in relations between the two countries.

Just as democracy in the world's fourth most populous state will take time to consolidate, so too the building of bilateral relations requires a patient and sensitive approach. The following five points outline the key challenges confronting the Australia-Indonesia relationship, and suggest some policy proposals for Australia as it seeks to assist Indonesia in its historic transition to democracy.

Clear and sensitive policy

Politicians on both sides of federal parliament must continue to show restraint and a certain degree of understanding as Indonesia moves towards democracy. Over time, this should help engender a greater degree



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of favourable public opinion in Indonesia regarding Australia. President Megawati's devolution of autonomy to provincial areas will make this popular Indonesia support for Australia even more important.

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The management of the US alliance is key to this goal of clearer Australian policy and Australia-friendly sentiment within Indonesia. With a population of 230 million, Indonesia matters more to Australia than Australia (population 20 million) matters to Indonesia. This fact should not be lost when framing policy that serves our US alliance obligations. The US will no doubt continue to expect strong and vocal support as was the case in Iraq, but Canberra should be mindful of the potential reactions to this support, not only in Jakarta but in Indonesia as a whole.

Closer to home, the use of multilateral forums like APEC and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) will engage the region and help foster more robust Indonesian-Australian ties. These relationship-building efforts should be consistent with wider foreign policy goals in the region.

Specialist linkages

A renewed focus on education is a practical and fruitful contribution to the Indonesia-Australia relationship. Such 'people-to-people' interaction fosters familiarity at a low cost. Indeed, Indonesia is Australia's biggest source of foreign students, with over 17,000 enrolments in 2000. By contrast, less than 50 Australian students will be studying at Indonesian universities for Semester 1, 2004 through agreements with 18 tertiary institutions across Australia. This number dropped to as low as 14 immediately after the Bali bombings.

To ensure that Indonesian studies are an educational priority for Australia, and that our expertise on Indonesia does not slip, the government's now defunct \$30 million program supporting Asian languages studies in Australia could be revisited. Similarly, the Australia/Indonesia Government Sector Linkages Program could be extended into wider Indonesian society to build educational linkages from the 'bottom up'. Two good examples of on-going efforts in

this regard are the Australia-Indonesia Institute (AII), established in 1989 to contribute to positive relations between the two countries, and the Australian Consortium for In-country Indonesian Studies (ACICIS), which provides access to Indonesian tertiary study.

These greater educational linkages could also be matched by a greater number of Australia-based embassy staff in Indonesia. There are approximately 65 Australia-based staff in Jakarta and two in Bali. A bolstering of staff levels would illustrate Australia's willingness to invest in the relationship, and would certainly benefit from the commitment of greater resources to training Indonesian specialists within Australia.



Indonesian soldier in Aceh.
Photo: Newspix/AFP/Hotli Simanjuntak

After Bali

The Bali bombings were a massive blow for the Megawati government. Indonesia is now at the front line in the so-called "war on terror". At the time of writing, the Australian government's travel warning on Indonesia read:

"We continue to advise Australians to defer non-essential travel to Indonesia, including Bali ... We continue to receive reports that further attacks are being planned against a variety of targets ... Australians in Indonesia who are concerned for their security should consider departing."

Presumably such travel warnings are sound and based on good intelligence and reflect

the gravity of the terrorist threat in Indonesia. Yet this terrorist threat also presents a great opportunity. Indonesia has the potential to be one of the success stories in the fight against terrorism.

In this regard, the success of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Indonesian Police Force (INP) collaboration post Bali is a move in the right direction. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was signed by the two countries in March 2003 proclaimed a willingness to work together to prevent, investigate and dismantle transnational crime activity, firearms trafficking and terrorism. Further moves to cement intelligence sharing and cooperation on this police level will strengthen bilateral relations. It will also demonstrate the importance of police and criminal investigation, rather than hard-nosed military capability, in combating regional terrorism.

Further training and capability delivery from Australia to Indonesia will be critical to future success. Joint AFP-INP ventures like the Anti-Money Laundering Task Force and the \$1.5million patrol boat and training package certainly augur well for future cooperation. These initiatives should help the INP as it separates from the Indonesian military (TNI) and undergoes structural, doctrinal and behavioural reform. This will help shift attention away from the TNI Special Forces (Kopassus) and might eventually defuse the simmering political debate over the role of Kopassus in joint Indonesian-Australian counter-terrorist exercises.

Separatist movements

The separatist movement in Papua poses an on-going threat to Indonesia's territorial integrity and to regional stability. There have been persistent calls from human rights groups to halt TNI violence and even murders, especially directed at Christians in Papua. The situation is being exacerbated by non-security threats—Papua has one-third of Indonesia's recorded HIV/AIDS cases, yet less than one per cent of its population—and by sporadic violence possibly instigated by TNI elements which includes the August 2002 killings of foreign teachers. There are even deep suspicions inside Indonesia that Australia views Papua as moving along the same trajectory as the now independent East Timor. At any rate, an escalating cycle of violence in Papua could lead to greater international attention, which would gravely complicate Australia's policy choices.

In Aceh, the threat to Indonesia's territorial cohesion by secessionist Free Aceh Movement (GAM) rebels remains unresolved. Human rights groups have criticised both Indonesian and GAM forces for committing widespread abuses. Australia publicly supports the right of the Indonesian government to use the military in Aceh to protect its national sovereignty. Australia's support rests on the premise that an intact Indonesian Federation is more desirable than fragmentation. Early in 2003, the Prime Minister reaffirmed "the total support of the Australian government for the indivisibility of the Indonesian Republic". The key issue here is support for Indonesian sovereignty, but also support for the development of democratic processes and government to ensure that there is not a spiralling of violence. Yet, this support could become problematic if further abuses by Indonesian military forces in Aceh are alleged.

Consolidating democracy

Indonesian and Australian leaders want the same thing—regional stability and economic prosperity. While Australia and Indonesia share these interests, the values of the two countries are not identical. A future Indonesian democracy will be different to Australian democracy, just as Indian democracy is different to democracy in the United Kingdom. A key difference in the democratic systems of the two countries is the role of Islam.

Australian politicians should seek to improve the Australian understanding of the role of Islam in a pluralist Indonesia by continuing to stress that the overwhelming majority of Indonesian Muslims are moderate. Indeed, misunderstanding Islam represents the greatest barrier to stronger Australian public support for Indonesia. It is a barrier that has been reinforced by Pan-Islamic reactions to Australia's involvement in the Iraq war, and which may grow more daunting if Islamic nationalist parties poll well in the 2004 elections.

A further problem is that many in Jakarta may be sick of hearing from established democracies like Australia about what to do and how to act. Many Indonesians may become increasingly disillusioned about the promises of reform, which have delivered more uncertainty than anything else. The key criticism of Megawati in this regard is that her reforms have not



Prime Minister John Howard with Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri in Jakarta. Photo: Newspix/Michael Jones

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matched those of her predecessor BJ Habibie. In a more optimistic light, however, it would seem that Megawati has steered Indonesia through a difficult period by consolidating small gains. To continue these gains and the movement towards democracy, it is critical that Indonesians remain patient.

Time for the future

There is always the danger that Indonesia will lapse into a military backed authoritarian state. The rise of militant Islam in Indonesia adds real weight to this danger—either through the rise of a military-backed government putting down militant Islamic elements, or by militant Islamic elements destabilising and contributing to the collapse of the Megawati government. If this were to occur, the East Timor-Indonesia border would become a pressure point for relations between Indonesia and Australia.

It is clear that the challenges for Indonesian democracy need to be thought about in time frames longer than the newly constituted 5-year presidential terms. Likewise, Australia should take a longer view and not rush into hasty decisions for the sake of short-term gains. The pendulum will continue to swing as Indonesia searches for democracy. At the same time, the clock is ticking for Australia to plot a new course in bilateral relations with our largest neighbour. While only time will tell, the past offers invaluable guidance for the future. ■

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For more information on the Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry into Australia's relations with Indonesia, including submissions and transcripts from hearings, visit www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/Indonesia/IndonIndex.htm or phone (02) 6277 2313 or email jscfadt@aph.gov.au

Cities fit to live in

A century ago, our forebears took urban planning action to address urgent public health issues in our cities. We must now act to address new public health epidemics such as obesity and depression, or face the consequences, writes Tony Capon.

The current House of Representatives Environment Committee inquiry into the sustainability of Australian cities enables us to ask a critical question: are we developing cities that will protect and promote the health of our nation's people?

There are many known influences on health in the urban environment. These include:

- physical activity;
- social cohesion;
- personal safety;
- food supply;
- air and water quality; and
- open space.

Evidence is mounting about links between contemporary public health epidemics, such as obesity and depression, and aspects of our urban environment. For example, a recent large study across 448 local government areas in the United States concluded that patterns of suburban sprawl influence how active people are, and the nature of their heart disease risk profiles (obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, etc).

Historically, we know that rapid urbanisation during the industrial revolution in 19th century Europe was associated with epidemics of infectious diseases due to overcrowding, contaminated water and lack of sanitation. Similar health issues were encountered in Australia and gave impetus to the early development of our urban planning profession.

Urban planning responses to these public health issues included the separation of residential areas from 'unhealthy' industries. Industrial pollution controls were put in place. Water supplies were protected and treated. Sanitation systems were developed.

By the early 20th century, those who could afford to were moving out of the crowded and 'unhealthy' inner cities into new garden suburbs with more space. Subsequently, public health imperatives in urban planning diminished.

However, by the end of the century concerns about air and water quality in our cities were back on the agenda.

Air pollution is now known to exacerbate asthma and other respiratory conditions. Although emission controls on motor vehicles have improved air quality, the total number of kilometres traversed in our cities is rising with increasing population and growing car dependency. Air quality is inevitably deteriorating.

Water quality issues are arising again with increasing frequency. A 'boil-water' order was imposed in Sydney for several months in 1998 as a response to concerns about microbial contamination of the city water supply. A large outbreak of hepatitis A linked to seafood consumption in New South Wales in 1997 was caused by effluent contamination of our fisheries associated with coastal urban development.

These concerns aside, arguably our most pressing current public health dilemmas are epidemics of obesity (and its attendant risks of heart disease, diabetes and some cancers), and depression and anxiety (and their association with drug and alcohol use). These have emerged in parallel with the increasing suburbanisation of Australian cities.

One in five adult Australians suffers from a mental disorder such as depression and anxiety, according to the 1997 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. And three in five Australians aged 25

years and older are overweight or obese, according to the 1999-2000 Australian Diabetes, Obesity and Lifestyle Study (AusDiab).

Obesity results from an energy imbalance, where energy intake (diet) exceeds energy expenditure (physical activity).

Most city dwellers acknowledge that modern urban living is sedentary, and research shows that current suburban designs can be a barrier to physical activity. Cul-de-sac street patterns make journeys longer and may foster car dependence, whereas grid street patterns provide a range of direct and alternate routes.

Opportunities for incidental physical activity are important determinants of our activity levels. Are there local shops to walk to in our suburb? Are we within walking distance to the bus or train?

Perceptions of community safety also influence our decisions about being active. Two in every three Australian primary school children travel to school by car; their parents were much more likely to have walked to school as children. What is the risk of pedestrian injury? Is there shade from summer sun? Is lighting adequate? Is there a paved footpath suitable for prams?

As suburbia spreads and we spend several hours travelling to and from work or study each day, that is time not available for recreational physical activity. Finding time to exercise in the morning rush can be difficult and finding motivation at the end of a long day of work and travel is similarly difficult.

And what of depression and mental health? Physical activity has value in the prevention and treatment of depression. Contact with nature and landscape may have similar value. Social cohesion is also associated with mental wellbeing.

Social isolation can be an issue in our cities. Just because we live in close proximity to others, it does not necessarily follow that we will know our neighbours.

We need time to develop relationships with family and others in our local community. We need places and spaces to come together as a community. Facilities for cultural, sporting and spiritual development need to reflect our evolving communities.

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