

Indonesia's Foreign Policy: Between Internationalism, Nationalism, Populism and Xenophobia

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What Is Internationalism Or International Activism?

- It is a foreign policy that is characterized by **a high frequency of international policy initiatives by using various diplomatic channels:** bilateral, regional and multilateral in dealing with issues that are relevant to national interests.
- It is also a belief that foreign policy problems can be effectively dealt with through a well organized international engagement with other nations or international organizations.
- Sometimes internationalism is used to divert people's attention from the real issues inside the country or to find a scapegoat for government's failure to deal with those issues.

Internationalism under SBY

- SBY gave a high priority to his foreign policy and he is quite active in making foreign policy initiatives at the regional as well as global level.
- SBY and his Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa introduced concepts like: million friends, zero enemies and dynamic equilibrium to guide Indonesia's foreign policy initiatives.
- SBY initiated Bali Democracy Forum (BDF) and conducted it annually in Bali.
- Marty Natalegawa also proposed the idea of Indo-Pacific Treaty as a regional architecture in the Asia Pacific (remains an idea until today).

- Indonesia hosted Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2007 in Bali (Bali Roadmap).
- Indonesia, a lead negotiator for the establishment of RCEP (focusing on ASEAN's centrality).
- SBY was elected co-chair of UN High Level Panel of Eminent Persons for Post-2015 Development Agendas.
- Indonesia tried to mediate the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia to resolve their territorial dispute (Preah Vihear).
- Indonesia took a leading role in the negotiations of the Code of Conduct in South China Sea despite China's strong rejection of that idea.

What is wrong with this kind of internationalism?

- In some instances it is not really clear WHY Indonesia came up with those initiatives. What is the rationale behind it? Are they related to our pressing national interests? Did SBY really respond to the domestic aspirations or was he using his foreign policy for his own image building (popularity as an anticipation for positions after he is no longer a president?)
- Is this just impression management or real efforts to accomplish Indonesia's national interests?
- Great ideas without rigorously considering the cost and benefit of implementing them (BDF, for instance). How we stick to the idea of ASEAN centrality without really knowing how to maintain ASEAN unity when we need it most (South China Sea and Rohingya).

- International activism in some instances was done while neglecting the resolving of domestic issues at hand (proposing international regulation of religious blasphemy but closing the eyes to see the repression of religious minorities at home).
- Indonesia is not aware of the fact that some countries have acted as free riders using the international platform initiated by Indonesia like BDF.

How has President Joko Widodo reacted?

- Jokowi's three policy pillars: Being sovereign in politics, being independent in economy, and having strong character in culture (foreign policy identity)
- How is this principle translated into foreign policy?
- There is no fundamental change in Jokowi's foreign policy but Indonesia becomes more selective in its international activism which is to be driven by real national interests (more down to earth foreign policy especially through the promotion of **economic diplomacy**).

- Promoting the idea of transforming Indonesia into a global maritime fulcrum (poros maritim dunia) as a core strategy in Jokowi's foreign policy. But it is still at the early stage if we look at the amount of military budget for the Indonesian navy, slow development of domestic connectivity in building ports and their supporting facilities.
- There are five elements to be realized: re-establishing a maritime culture, securing and managing maritime resources, prioritizing maritime infrastructure and connectivity, maritime diplomacy, and developing Indonesia's maritime defense capacity.

- The element of populist nationalism in Jokowi's foreign policy can be seen in his determination to execute the narcotics prisoners despite international condemnations and the sinking of illegal fishing vessels.
- There is also a plan to review some Bilateral Investment Agreements (BITs) which are perceived as biased against Indonesia's economic interests.
- Foreign mining companies are obliged to build smelter in Indonesia as a requirement for the extension of their contracts.

Critical remarks

- Internationalism, nationalism and populism in foreign policy is not either or choice. In this era of globalization the government should find a well thought-out balance between these approaches for the sake of national interests.
- Any foreign policy style is not in and of itself good or bad as long as there is a clear rationale behind it. Many times we are not clear about the WHY of the policy. We do not really know why do what we do. For instance, what is actually the real purpose of hosting BDF? What if other countries act as “free riders” and use it as stage to justify their own undemocratic practices at home? Should Indonesia be indifferent or silent for the sake of political correctness?

- Internationalism should be accompanied by serious efforts to improve things at home (national competitiveness, good governance, protection of human rights and minority groups, law enforcement, etc.).
- A good foreign policy also depends on choosing the right channel to promote Indonesia's interests. Foreign policy makers should know how to have a good combination of bilateral and regional channels. For instance, the management of our relationship with China.

- We need to mention also another element of Indonesia's current foreign policy: **pragmatism**, a policy that is designed to do what is more practical and gives us immediate and tangible benefits. For instance: Indonesia has decided to give free visas to 45 countries in order to increase tourist visits.
- Thus, Indonesia needs a shrewd or creative combination of balance of all these elements in order to maximize the accomplishment of our foreign policy objectives.
- Therefore, we need a mental shift from **one-dimensional foreign policy** (sectoral approach) to **foreign policy governance** (managing multidimensional foreign relations)

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