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Diplomatic adventurism in Indonesia?

Abstract

Extract:

Indonesia's Department of Foreign Affairs (Departemen Luar Negeri) has committed itself to a new bureaucratic and policy structure as from January 2002. The aim of the restructuring is to involve the entire government and all sectors of society in Indonesia's diplomatic profile and to reflect the ferment for reform in Indonesia that has made its constituencies more and more pluralistic.

Keywords

foreign affairs, diplomacy

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Diplomatic Adventurism in Indonesia?

by Anne Cullen

"Most foreign policy makers would agree that in their experience, the contents of books on international relations written by academics bear almost no resemblance to their own experiences and foreign policy practitioners, or any relevance to the day-to-day concerns of foreign-policy making. On the other hand, most academics share the belief that practitioners are overly secretive and elitist about their proximity to the policy process, uninterested in the results of academic research on international relations, and unduly obsessed with policy minutiae and organisational structures." (1)

The argument (above) that theory and practice in diplomacy is destined to never cohabit comfortably in reality is being challenged by a (re)structuring of foreign policy in Indonesia for the 21st century. Indonesia's Department of Foreign Affairs (*Departemen Luar Negeri*) has committed itself to a new bureaucratic and policy structure as from January 2002. The aim of the restructuring is to involve "the entire Government and all sectors of society" (2) in Indonesia's diplomatic profile and to reflect "the ferment for reform in Indonesia [that] has made its constituencies more and more pluralistic." (3) To this end, Hassan Wirajuda, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, has instigated the theoretical model of diplomacy that was first espoused by Joseph Montville – Track-Two diplomacy; a model that promotes political pluralism through the marriage of the practitioner, the theorist and the public (or constituencies). While it is possible to laud this new pluralist direction in the Department of Foreign Affairs, it is also possible to argue that pluralism has always been evident in Indonesian policy making process, and consequently the implementations of an inclusionary theoretical model of foreign policy is a logical next-step for New Indonesia given prevailing conditions.

Stated simply, Track-Two diplomacy refers to dialogue(s) between non-state acts on issues of diplomacy usually reserved for Track One, or official diplomats. The objective is to construct supportive environments whereby non-state actors with an active interest in the issue, usually regarding peace-making activities, can either initiate discussions on some issue hitherto unbroachable by the Track One diplomats, or begin the process of clearing away dialogue blockages precluding formal diplomatic discussions through informal dialogue, workshops, roundtables and other less-than-formal environments. The aim of Track Two diplomacy strategies is to reverse a seeming intractable conflict situation and promote peace-making strategies. (4) Indonesia has reworked this simple understanding to broaden the objective of Track Two diplomacy to incorporate domestic considerations: political peacemaking and society-building ends, while recognising prevailing economic limitations. The policy shift from 'typical' statesmanship diplomacy to an 'alternative' diplomacy model is purposeful and reflects a pluralist shift in the Indonesian polity concurrent with, at least popular perceptions, of the Megawati Sukarnoputri government.

Dian Wirengjurit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asserts that while "the immediate aim of the government's foreign policy is to restore the nation's image and regain the trust and confidence of foreign investors...", the policy in Indonesia also seeks to utilise "... citizens from a variety of backgrounds and with a variety of skills...[to] be involved and activated to help restore Indonesia's image abroad and secure national programs." (5) Such inclusionary politics was once believed unobtainable (especially under the Soeharto New Order). Orthodox analyses of Indonesian politics both pre- and post-Soeharto, have argued that political containment (especially through corporatism, elitism and patrimonialism) was the *raison d'être* for the State. And as such, Wesley's argument in the opening quote would hold true: the practitioners of official diplomacy (Track One) work autonomously from Indonesian citizenry. But under recent restructuring, citizen diplomacy will not only be sought, but also actively encouraged. Is this a marked change in Indonesia however?

I believe that Indonesia's pronouncement of the restructuring of the Foreign Affairs Department and the policy of inclusionary politics is little more than an evolutionary continuance of Indonesia's post-

colonial social policy – albeit with an international character. New Order Indonesia is a case in point. Although constituency politics were not openly acknowledged, their beneath-the-surface activity was none the less effective. Take for example the multifarious constituencies of the sector from the military-General-as-entrepreneur forestry in the 1960s through to the rise of the industrialists in the 1970s and the emergence of strong environmental Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) from the 1980s. None publicly trumpeted their ability to influence policy making process or affect policy changes post-implementation, (6) but all constituencies were notable in their pluralistic abilities within the Indonesian polity. The Indonesian government has assiduously maintained that society has a vital role to play in the development of the nation – but only because of, or indeed despite of, well-constructed ideological and philosophical controls that simultaneously enhanced national development, financially rewarded the political elite, and firmly ensconced ruling groups.

However, the prevailing system only served to increasingly pauperize governmental abilities to rule autonomously, and by the 1980s we witness a government that charges its citizens to engage in national development. Specifically referring to the inclusion of NGOs in national development, J. B. Sumarlin, Minister of State for National Development and Planning stated in 1985:

...non-government organisation participation in national development is needed because government cannot, should not and will not do everything; government cannot, should not and will not conduct every development effort; and government cannot, should not and will not respond to every need simultaneously throughout this large nation. (7)

Later studies by William Liddle,(8) Andrew MacIntyre (9) and myself,(10) show that Sumarlin's words have not been the exception in the Indonesian political arena, but rather the norm. Indonesian politics has been characterised by effective and inclusionary constituency politics.

This brings us back to the main point of this discussion: the (re)structuring of the Foreign Ministry and our contemplation of the divorce between diplomatic theorists and practitioners. Wesley essentially argues a cultural divide between foreign policy theorist and practitioner. Existing in divergent realities, the theorist, according to Wesley, tends to be an academic and rooted in the Anglo-American tradition. (11) On the other hand, the practitioner pre-empted the demands of Ministers and balanced daily foreign policy demands within a bureaucratic culture. But I believe that it is possible to argue that the diplomacy field worldwide has tended to be rooted in those very same 'diplo-statesman' Anglo-American traditions: by and large outdated models of statesman diplomacy predicate both theory and action in the diplomacy paradigm. The Indonesian Foreign Ministry has not been immune to this model. Ali Alatas, for example, as Foreign Minister under the Soeharto government, was seen as an affable representative of the diplo-statesman.

It seems to me, at least, that Indonesia has breached the void that has so splintered Western Diplomacy. In its rapid democratic transition and fragile economic recovery-mode, Indonesia has found a maturity and confidence in its Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Hassan Wirayuda is well situated to implement this fusion-style diplomacy: he is both Indonesian and Western-educated, a Minister in one of the world's newest democracies but one of its oldest civilizations. Under his guidance Indonesia has elected to embrace a (radical) Western model of diplomacy, one that utilizes the nation's historical tendency to include and deploy its citizens (most often organised, normally voluntarily but sometimes mandatorily, into constituencies) to fulfil the very diplomatic and political tasks the State is not able to perform. Indonesia has done so by employing a model articulated by a diplomatic theorist. And so all fields merge, the theorist, the practitioner and the citizen are involved in the formation and deployment of Indonesia's foreign policy. Only time will now tell if this new direction in Indonesia's foreign policy is a rational response that can be sustained under conditions of global and regional turmoil, or an exploit in diplomatic adventurism.

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