

ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

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7 Islam and foreign policy under Megawati

The politics of precarious compromise

The tenure of President Abdurrahman Wahid, whose rise to presidency was made possible by the support from a loose coalition of Islamic political forces, lasted only for twenty-one months (October 1999–July 2001). After weeks of intense political battle, he was finally replaced by Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of the founder of the Republic of Indonesia and the country's first president, Sukarno. The circumstances within which the transfer of power took place reflected a double irony in post-Suharto Indonesian politics. First, Wahid's downfall was orchestrated by the same coalition of Islamic political parties – the Central Axis – that brought him to power in the first place. Second, the rise of Megawati was made possible by support from the Central Axis, the same political force that had prevented her bid to presidency in July 1999. The concession was for Megawati to agree on a vice-president from the Islamist camp, namely, Hamzah Haz of the PPP. With the fall of Wahid and the rise of Megawati, a new political compromise, manifested in the formation of a coalition government between secular-nationalist and Islam, was set in motion.

This chapter examines the nature of Indonesian foreign policy within that context of political compromise. It first examines the nature of the Megawati government as a form of Islamic–nationalist marriage of convenience. The second section then looks at the foreign policy agenda and priorities of the Megawati government, and examines the extent to which that foreign policy agenda and priorities have or have not been influenced by Islamic considerations. Finally, this chapter looks at the impacts of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the USA on Indonesian foreign policy, especially in the context of the imperative of reconciling domestic weakness on the one hand and the dilemma of dual identity on the other. The analysis of Indonesia's response to the horrific event once again reveals the nature of Islamic influence on Indonesian foreign policy as a secondary factor.

The nature of the Megawati government: the Islamic–nationalist marriage of convenience

The fall of President Wahid

The game plan to bring Wahid down originated from the growing disaffection felt by Islamic political parties with the Wahid government. Enigmatic and erratic as he has always been, President Wahid's policies, both domestic and foreign, angered many people. That disaffection began as early as January 2000, barely three months after his election, when President Wahid fired three key ministers from his Cabinet, ignoring the fact that they came from parties that formed the core of his coalition government. For example, he first fired Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Hamzah Haz, who was also Chairman of the PPP. Elite frictions grew stronger after the sacking of two other ministers, Minister of Trade and Industry Jusuf Kalla of Golkar and State Minister for Investment and State-Owned Enterprises Laksamana Sukardi of PDI-P. The move left a strong feeling among his coalition partners that the President was trying to consolidate his own position and abandon the power-sharing agreement.

The performance of the Wahid government also served as a source of resentment. Criticisms began to be expressed by important segments of the political elite when it became apparent that the Wahid government faced a serious problem in implementing its policies and delivering its promises. Many criticised that the Wahid government (a) was too preoccupied with political issues; (b) did not have a clear policy direction in solving the economic crisis and in preventing the problem of national disintegration; (c) did not have a sense of urgency and priority; (d) tended to create unnecessary new political problems; (e) was unable to improve the economy; and (f) failed to bring an end to communal and religious conflicts. When such wide-ranging criticisms were voiced by important segments of the political elite, mass organisations, business community, and the intellectuals, it was clear that domestic confidence in President Wahid's government, and indeed in the President himself, dwindled quickly.

Within six months of his presidency, President Wahid managed to antagonise three key forces in Indonesian politics at the same time. First, the President's relationship with leaders of the Islamic political parties, which supported his rise to the presidency, rapidly deteriorated. Second, Wahid's erratic behaviour also created some problems between the President and his Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri. Third, the relationship with Indonesia's Defence Force (TNI) also deteriorated rapidly due to the President's tendency to intervene in internal military affairs. When reports about the President's involvement in corruption scandals broke out, the pressure for him to resign began to mount.

When Wahid reacted defiantly against his critics, threats of impeachment were increasingly voiced, primarily by the Central Axis forces. By early 2001,

the opposition against Wahid's rule strengthened dramatically and led to the formation of an unlikely coalition between Megawati's secular-nationalist camp and the Islamic Central Axis forces. Support soon mounted for Vice-President Megawati to take over. When Golkar and the military joined the fray by dropping their support to the Wahid presidency, he was finally removed from power in late July 2001, paving the way for Megawati to become the fifth president of Indonesia. Realising that it would be difficult for her to rule without support from Islamic political forces, Megawati agreed to throw her party's support behind Hamzah Haz as vice-president – the man who had previously opposed a female president. Indeed, such a marriage of convenience between secular-nationalist and Islamic groups was made possible only by their common interest to remove Wahid from power.

The fragile nature of the Megawati coalition government became more apparent when, on 7 August, she unveiled the Cabinet line-up that clearly reflected a broad coalition that included members of the Central Axis, the military, and Golkar. Members of Wahid's party, the PKB, were conspicuously absent from the Cabinet. As her party only holds 153 out of 500 seats in the DPR and 185 of the 695 members of the MPR, President Megawati had no choice but to form such a broad coalition government in order to minimise the opposition to her rule. All parties with significant representation in the DPR and MPR, except Wahid's PKB, were included in her government. She awarded three posts in the Cabinet to Golkar, two to PPP, and one each for the PBB and PAN. Meanwhile, the military was represented in the Cabinet by four retired generals. Indeed, it has been observed that "the cabinet, therefore, has a truly 'rainbow' quality with the consequences that, apart from the PKB, there is no scope for a formal 'opposition' in the DPR."¹ And, by agreeing to have Hamzah Haz as her vice-president, Megawati also recognised the importance of Islamic credentials to strengthen the legitimacy of her government.

Return of the state identity problem

Even though the election of Hamzah Haz as vice-president as well as the composition of the government reflected Megawati's attempt to strike a balance between the secular-nationalist forces she represents and Islam, many doubted that such a marriage of convenience between the two groups would endure without any problems.² Many also doubted that the inclusion of two Islamic parties – PPP and PBB – in the Cabinet would mitigate the Islamic challenge to the Megawati government. As mentioned earlier, the two parties had been actively involved in the previous campaign, opposing a woman as president. More importantly, the question of state identity has long been the main point of contention between the PDI-P and the two Islamic parties. While the PDI-P clearly prefers to maintain a non-religious character of the Indonesian state, the PPP and the PBB have never hidden their intention to

bring back the Jakarta Charter, that obliges all Muslims to adhere to the *shariah* law, into the 1945 Constitution. As discussed earlier, the adoption of the Charter by the state, which was dropped from the Constitution on 18 August 1945, is tantamount to a change in Indonesia's secular state identity into an Islamic state. From the PDI-P's point of view, therefore, the election of Hamzah Haz as vice-president was clearly expected to reduce the call for the implementation of *shariah* law from some quarters of the Islamic community.³

Challenge to the Megawati government on the issue of state identity came in late August 2001, a few weeks after her election, when thousands of members of FPI launched a demonstration in front of the DPR. They demanded the revival of the Jakarta Charter in the 1945 Constitution and called for the implementation of the *shariah* law. The pressure became more significant when the PPP and the PBB officially proposed to the MPR that the Jakarta Charter be adopted in the 1945 Constitution during its Annual Session in November that year.⁴ The move clearly demonstrated that the inclusion of PPP and PBB in the Megawati government had not changed the position of the two parties on the issue. In fact, many believed that the relaunching of the Jakarta Charter issue, especially by the PPP and the PBB, was meant to test the Megawati government.

The move, however, failed to attract much support from other political parties, including those parties with significant Islamic support. Responding to the demands by PPP and PBB, Amien Rais of PAN, for example, suggested that Muslims should pursue "a politics of salt, not flags or lipstick." In his view, the substance, rather than form or symbol (Islamic state), was more important for Muslims. Therefore, Amien maintained that "the desire to revive the Jakarta Charter is not relevant."⁵ The call for the reinsertion of the Jakarta Charter was also rejected by PKB, Golkar, and as expected the PDI-P. Without the support from other major parties, the move by PPP and PBB only represented a minority voice in the MPR. Indeed, the PBB and PPP only hold 14 and 70 seats respectively in the MPR. Nevertheless, Hamzah Haz and other PPP and PBB leaders vowed that "they would keep the issue in the spotlight through the 2004 election campaign."⁶ In other words, the issue of state identity has once again been brought back to the centre stage of politics in Indonesia.

In the wider context of Indonesia's Muslim community, however, the call for the reinsertion of the Jakarta Charter and the implementation of *shariah* law, which will in effect alter the Indonesian state identity as a Pancasila state, only has a slim chance of succeeding mainly because of the absence of support from the majority of Indonesian Muslims. When a similar attempt was launched by PPP and PBB in August 2000, mainstream Muslim organisations, such as NU and Muhammadiyah, had already rejected it.⁷ When both parties tried again in November 2001, both NU and Muhammadiyah once again reiterated their disagreement. Despite the absence of majority support for an

Islamic state, the episode clearly demonstrates that post-Suharto Indonesia continues to face a problem from the dilemma of dual identity.

Persistent domestic weakness

In addition to the Islamic challenge on the issue of state identity, the Megawati government also functions within the context of continuing domestic weakness. While the election of Megawati has brought a sense of stability at elite level politics, the overall political, security, and economic challenges facing the new government are no less daunting. Megawati inherited an economy that was still hardly recovered from the shocks and impacts of the 1997 financial crisis. On the political field, the government is still faced with difficult challenges from the agenda of crucial political reforms, such as the constitutional amendments, electoral reform, controlling the military, and combating corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN). On the security front, the problems of law and order, inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts in Maluku and Central Sulawesi, and the threats of armed separatist movements in Aceh and Papua, continue to pose a serious challenge to the country.

During its first few weeks, the Megawati government brought a degree of hope to economic recovery. That hope was primarily encouraged by President Megawati's decision to give key economic posts in the Cabinet to professionals rather than to the politicians. There was also a sense of political stability which emanated from the possibility that the Megawati government would not be replaced until 2004. By January 2002, however, "the sense is also growing that while the government may be muddling along successfully enough, it is not being sufficiently vigorous in attacking the issues facing the country."⁸ The magnitude of the problem proved to be too enormous for Megawati's economic team comprised of technocrats to resolve. The country's banking system is still far from being restructured, and the selling of assets remains an arduous process. The capital outflow, which amounted to US\$5.9 billion in 2001, clearly suggested that investor confidence had not been restored.⁹ Even in the first two months of 2002, foreign direct investment drooped to US\$489.3 million, down from US\$2.33 billion.¹⁰ There has been no way out of the problem of massive foreign and domestic debts. On top of all the problems, corruption is still rampant, and by the end of 2001 Indonesia was regarded as the most corrupt country in the Asia-Pacific.

The Megawati government also found out how difficult it was to improve the economy in a volatile political climate. Despite the return of a degree of political stability at the elite level, broader political reform is far from complete. All the problems faced by the previous Wahid government continue to pose a similarly difficult challenge for the Megawati government. Here, it should be emphasised that the fall of Wahid and the rise of Megawati clearly reflect the complex nature of Indonesian politics in the post-Suharto era. After Suharto's downfall in May 1998, anti-New Order forces – represented by

Wahid, Megawati, and Amien Rais – soon found themselves incapable of sustaining a united front necessary for carrying out the task of democratic reform. They had to face the divisive nature of a highly competitive political system in which old forces – the military and Golkar – remain influential and powerful. In that context, it is clear that despite Suharto's departure, the new government still presides over the system he had created. Indeed, despite common reference to the emergence of an *Indonesia Baru* (New Indonesia), today's Indonesia has not yet managed to make a complete break with the past.

The security situation also continues to be a strong reminder of how weak the Indonesian government has become since the outbreak of economic and political crisis in 1997–1998. Communal violence and armed separatist movements continue to plague Indonesia, threatening the country's national integration, both in social and territorial senses. The situation in Poso, Central Sulawesi, and Maluku, remain volatile despite the government's attempts to bring the conflicts in those areas to an end. The efficacy of the government approach, which relies more on a symbolic peace agreement between conflicting parties, has been doubted due to the lack of discipline within the security apparatus in the field. Unlike the Wahid government's soft approach, the Megawati government seems to favour more repressive measures in dealing with the problems of the separatist movements in Aceh and Papua. In Papua, elements of the military have been allegedly involved in the murder of a leading pro-independence leader, Theys Eluay. In Aceh, the security situation remains unchanged. Despite the ongoing peace talks between the government and the rebels, armed clashes between the rebels (GAM) and security forces continued, with casualties in both camps increasing. Indeed, violence continued to escalate during the first six months of Megawati's presidency.

On balance, it can be argued that the economic, political, and security condition of Megawati's Indonesia continues to reflect a persistent reality of domestic weakness. That reality consequently forces the government to pay more attention and devote most of its resources to solving mounting domestic problems. In such circumstances, the conduct of foreign policy will be directed to serve domestic political and economic interests. In other words, Indonesian foreign policy under the Megawati government, like foreign policies of the previous governments, will also be defined by the domestic political reality rather than by ideological and religious considerations. As discussed below, the Megawati government also pursues a foreign policy that bears a non-religious character.

The absence of Islamic agenda in foreign policy

Unlike former President Wahid who tended to initiate new and often controversial foreign policy initiatives, President Megawati seemed to prefer the return to a conventional agenda that reflects national priorities. In the speech

during the announcement of her Cabinet, named *Kabinet Gotong Royong* (Mutual Help Cabinet), President Megawati unveiled the “six-point working program” (*Enam Program Kerja*), namely (1) maintain national unity; (2) continue reform and democratisation process; (3) normalise economic life; (4) uphold law, restore security and peace, and eradicate corruption, collusion, and nepotism; (5) restore Indonesia’s international credibility; and (6) prepare for the 2004 general election.¹¹ Even though the “six-point working program” did not provide a sense of policy direction, it did provide a sense of the priorities that the Megawati government intended to pursue. In that context, foreign policy would be geared towards supporting the attainment of the six national priorities.

The focus on domestic priorities was clearly demonstrated in the absence of reference to foreign relations in the President’s first speech before the DPR on 16 August 2001. The speech, which outlined various challenges and problems facing her government and the country, only referred to foreign policy in passing when she simply stated that the government would conduct a “free and active foreign policy, recovering state’s and nation’s dignity and returning the trust of foreign countries, including international donors institutions and investors, to the government.”¹² This statement clearly demonstrates that instead of pursuing a new course in foreign policy, the Megawati government reinvigorated familiar themes in Indonesian diplomacy in which the non-religious character of foreign policy was preserved and reinforced. In other words, Megawati’s foreign policy clearly shows a sense of continuity with that of the New Order’s.

First, the emphasis on free and active foreign policy reflected the intention to bring back Indonesian foreign policy to serve its traditional functions of fulfilling domestic political and economic interests. The return of the traditional functions of foreign policy is clearly reflected in the way foreign policy is conceived as an instrument to support the attainment of national interests. For example, President Megawati contended that “my visit to the US, the United Nations, Japan and my attendance at the APEC Economic Leaders Meeting in Shanghai recently, were intended to be a measure to improve the cooperation for the sake of our national interests.”¹³ Minister of Foreign Affairs Hassan Wirayuda also reaffirmed “a consistency in free and independent foreign policy carried out to serve national interests, with a focus to respond to real challenges facing us today.”¹⁴

Second, Megawati’s foreign policy also echoed the New Order’s theme of using foreign policy as an instrument to shape a peaceful international environment, which would in turn facilitate the internal recovery process at home. Explaining her visit to nine ASEAN countries immediately after her confirmation as president, for example, President Megawati maintained that the visit was meant to “create a strategic environment conducive for the implementation of domestic recovery measures.”¹⁵ Foreign Minister Wirayuda reiterated the use of foreign policy for such purpose when he stated that “in

order to achieve the Cabinet's programs, we need a conducive external environment, namely an environment that is stable, secure, peaceful, and prosperous."¹⁶

Third, the Megawati government also reaffirmed the return of the "concentric circles" concept in Indonesian foreign policy that recognises Southeast Asia as the most important region for Indonesia, and also the importance of East Asia, the United States, and South Pacific countries. Especially on the importance of Southeast Asia, President Megawati maintained that "besides reaffirming ASEAN as the cornerstone of Indonesia's foreign policy, the visits were aimed at improving bilateral relations with the countries in the region."¹⁷ With such statements, the Megawati government clearly intends to restore the place of ASEAN as the cornerstone of Indonesian foreign policy. She also maintained that "of no less importance [for Indonesia] is West Pacific with which, since August, Indonesia has become the dialogue partner of the Pacific Forum."¹⁸ The importance of the United States was confirmed by Foreign Minister Wirayuda who saw President Megawati's visit to Washington on 18 September 2001 as "an important pillar in our attempt to develop a new era between Indonesia and the United States."¹⁹

Reference to the Arab-Islamic world, let alone to the importance of Islam in foreign policy, has been conspicuously absent. Unlike the Habibie and Wahid governments, the Megawati government has not made any specific reference to the place of the Middle East or the Arab-Islamic world in Indonesian foreign policy. Major policy pronouncements, such as the President's speeches before the MPR and DPR, and also the Year End Statement of the Foreign Minister, were also void of any expression of co-religionist solidarity on issues such as Afghanistan or the Israel-Palestine conflict. On American attacks on Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Wirayuda maintained that "any military action in Afghanistan should have very specific, appropriate and limited targets."²⁰ In his Year End Statement, Minister Wirayuda even "welcome[d] the creation of a new government in Afghanistan and support the efforts at peace-building, rehabilitation, and reconstruction of Afghanistan by the international community."²¹ Moreover, the secondary importance of the Arab-Islamic world in Megawati's foreign policy was clearly demonstrated by the absence of any plan to visit Middle Eastern countries during her first year in power.

The absence of the Islamic factor in Megawati's foreign policy can also be understood in the context of domestic weakness. Economic difficulties, whose recovery requires international support, clearly dictate a foreign policy that continues to seek close relations with Western countries and its international financial institutions. This reality was shown in the government's reaffirmation of the importance of the United States, the IMF, and the World Bank in Indonesian foreign policy. Immediately after announcing her Cabinet, President Megawati left for a series of visits to ASEAN countries. It was no coincidence that Megawati made the USA, and then Japan as the first and

second destinations of her foreign visits outside Southeast Asia, followed by visits to China and South Korea in March 2002, and then to several European countries in mid-June 2002. From the order of those visits alone, one can clearly see an affirmation of the importance of ASEAN, Northeast Asia, the USA and Europe for Indonesia.

Even though the agenda, priorities, and the conduct of diplomacy under President Megawati reflect Indonesia's return to its conventional foreign policy, thus reinforcing the continuity rather than change with that of the New Order's foreign policy, the influence of the Islamic factor cannot be overlooked. Despite the absence of an Islamic agenda in Megawati's foreign policy, her government – like other previous governments – could not simply ignore the Islamic voices on international issues with an identifiable Islamic dimension. President Megawati, like all her predecessors, is also faced with the challenge of managing the domestic weakness and the dilemma of dual identity. Indonesia's response to the September 11 terrorist attacks in the USA clearly demonstrates how such a challenge had to be dealt with through a politics of precarious compromise balancing the need to overcome domestic weaknesses through international support on the one hand, and the necessity to recognise the Islamic voices on the other. And, not unlike during the previous periods, the Islamic factor once again sets the limit within which foreign policy can be carried out.

The Islamic challenge in foreign policy: dealing with “September 11”

The impact of the horrific terrorist attacks in the United States on Indonesian domestic politics constituted the first serious challenge to President Megawati since she became Indonesia's fifth president in July 2001. The tragic event unleashed a wave of anti-American sentiments that quickly became a formidable constraint to attempts by the Megawati government to restore its international credibility and accelerate the economic recovery. The event also demonstrates the vulnerability of the Megawati government to the Islamic challenge in its attempt to consolidate political power. In the event, the Megawati government was forced to find a balance between the USA's demands for full support for its war against terrorism on the one hand, and radical Islamic groups' outcry at home demanding the government take a primarily anti-USA stance on the other.

Indeed, in formulating its official attitude towards September 11 and Washington's subsequent response, the Indonesian government was torn between two conflicting positions. It recognised that Indonesia would soon have to undergo a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, government officials loyal to President Megawati were greatly aware that the horrific event would become a serious international issue with wide-ranging implications for the whole world, including Indonesia. In that context, Indonesia might not

have many choices but to express its support for the American call to combat terrorism. On the other hand, it also recognised the need to carefully weigh its position against possible domestic reactions, particularly from the Muslim community. To that effect, the Megawati government was aware that its support for the American call for a global war on terrorism might be construed at home as an act of submission to the USA.

The pressure was strongly felt by the Indonesian government as President Megawati was scheduled to leave for the United States to meet President George Bush on 19 September, a week after the World Trade Center tragedy. As the date for her departure was approaching, the situation in Jakarta quickly turned to her disadvantage. Several Islamic groups began to stage protests on the streets of Jakarta, and expressed their anger at the American accusation that Osama bin Laden was the mastermind of the September 11 attacks; an act they saw as America's attempt to scapegoat Islam. The timing of Megawati's departure became all the more delicate when her Vice-President, Hamzah Haz of the Muslim-oriented United Development Party (PPP), began to express his displeasure at what he saw as an attempt by the USA to discredit the Islamic world. He not only resented accusations by the USA against the Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden but went to the extent of saying that the attacks "will hopefully cleanse America of its sins."²²

President Megawati flew to the USA with such a domestic political scene in the background. The official Indonesian position was revealed by President Megawati directly to President George Bush during a meeting at the White House on 19 September. She told her host that "we mourn with America, that we share your grief and outrage, and that we strongly condemn terrorism in all of its forms and manifestations." She also stressed that "Indonesia is ready to cooperate with the US and other civilized countries on counter-terrorism."²³ President Megawati also "condemned the barbaric and indiscriminate acts against innocent civilians," and pledged "to cooperate with the international community in combating terrorism."²⁴ In New York, President Megawati called September 11 "the worst atrocity . . . in the history of civilization."²⁵

In return for her support, Washington pledged to continue its support to help Indonesia rebuild its economy shattered by the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s, and expressed continuing support for Indonesia's difficult transition towards democracy. The most encouraging promise by Washington to the Indonesian government was the pledge to seek for a renewal of military ties between the two countries, which had been disrupted since September 1999, including the promise to lift an embargo on sales of non-lethal military items and the establishment of a bilateral security dialogue. In total, Washington pledged to provide financial aid of US\$657.7 million to Indonesia.²⁶

In Indonesia, however, the good news was received with a degree of suspicion, especially within radical Islamic circles. Jafar Umar Thalib, the leader of Laskar Jihad, maintained that Megawati's visit to the USA "clearly ignored the feeling of the ummah." The visit, he said, "can be seen as a

form of support by Megawati to America's plan to attack Afghanistan."²⁷ Consequently, anti-American protests grew larger and stronger, especially in response to reports of an imminent American attack on Afghanistan. Mass demonstrations against the USA were now also staged in several other cities by several Islamic organisations.

The scope of the protests became alarming when several hardline Islamic groups, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and the Laskar Jihad (Jihad Troops), began to warn Americans to leave Indonesia immediately.²⁸ They also threatened to use their paramilitaries to "sweep" hotels and other places in search of American visitors. Some even went to the extent of threatening to attack American facilities and interests in Indonesia if the USA carried out its plan to attack Afghanistan. Concerned about the growing magnitude of anti-American protests and threats to American interests and citizens, the US Ambassador to Indonesia, Robert Gelbard, filed a request for a security guarantee to the Indonesian police.²⁹ When he felt that the police would not be able to extend such a guarantee, the US Embassy was forced to close for two weeks.³⁰

The most serious development, however, occurred on 25 September when the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), stated its position. The Council, a semi-official body of Indonesian clerics, issued a declaration calling "on Muslims in the world for *jihad fi sabilillah* (fight in the path of Allah) should the aggression by the U.S. and its allies against Afghanistan and the Islamic world occur."³¹ The MUI's Secretary-General Din Syamsuddin, arguing that "the aggression towards Afghanistan could be seen as [an act of] hostility and hatred against Islam and Muslims, and as [an act of] injustice, terrorism and a form of imperialism," called on "the U.S. government to reflect on the injustices it has been responsible for and the double standards it has adopted, especially the violations against human rights that have affected the Muslim community."³² Two other important points included in the Council's statement – the condemnation of the September 11 terrorist attacks and its opposition to the planned "sweeping" against American citizens – were understandably overshadowed by the call for jihad. In effect, the MUI's declaration of jihad was seen as "one of the harshest statements of support for the Taliban heard from any state-sponsored religious body in the Muslim world."³³

The pressure intensified when the USA finally went ahead with its plan to attack Afghanistan and the Taliban. As anti-US protests now began to pose a challenge to the Megawati presidency, on 8 October the government was forced to issue a six-point statement on the issue.³⁴ It stated, first, that the government expressed a deep concern that a military act was finally carried out. Second, Indonesia noted the statement by the American government that the operation is only launched against terrorist training camps and military installations, and that the operation is not meant as an act of hostility against Islam. Third, the government of Indonesia hopes that the operation is strictly limited in terms of targets and duration so that it would minimise civilian

casualties. Fourth, Indonesia calls on the United Nations to undertake collective response to restore the situation. Fifth, the government of Indonesia warns that reactions and sympathy from Indonesian society should not be expressed in ways contrary to the law. Finally, Indonesia would provide humanitarian assistance to ease the suffering of the people of Afghanistan.

Such a position, however, angered radical groups in Indonesia, especially because the government failed to condemn US military action against Afghanistan. The statement, which stopped short of criticising the US military campaign, was also seen as a statement of support to the USA. Consequently, anti-American protests intensified. Radical groups began to burn American flags and an effigy of President Bush. Threats to expel American citizens intensified. In Makassar, South Sulawesi, the Japanese flag at its consulate there was hauled down by a group of radical students.³⁵ Several Islamic organisations launched a campaign to boycott American goods and products. Some even began to register volunteers to be sent to join the Taliban government in Afghanistan in their fight against the USA. The MUI condemned the US military campaign as “a manifestation of arrogance and oppression,” renewed its call for jihad, and urged the Indonesian government to temporarily freeze its diplomatic relations with the USA and its allies.³⁶ Din Syamsuddin even declared that “the MUI will not bar the Muslims [in Indonesia] from taking up arms to wage *jihad*. That is part of human rights.”³⁷ The call by the MUI that Indonesia break its diplomatic ties with the USA were increasingly voiced by other radical Islamic groups.

Such turn of events clearly put the Megawati government on the defensive. Megawati finally bowed to pressure when, on 14 October at the Istiqlal Grand Mosque in Jakarta, she issued sharp criticisms of the US military campaign in Afghanistan. She declared that “it is unacceptable that someone, a group or even a government-arguing that they are hunting down perpetrators of the terror-attack people or another country for whatever reason.” She also maintained that “there are rules that need to be observed. Without observing those rules, the action initially meant to combat violence at the end would itself become a new act of terror and violence” and “blood cannot be cleansed with blood.”³⁸ The speech, especially the criticisms against the USA, was widely seen in Indonesia and abroad as a significant departure from Indonesia’s previous stance on the issue. As mentioned earlier, in its statement on 8 October, the Megawati government refrained from criticising the American attack, expressing instead the hope that “the operation is strictly limited in terms of targets and duration so that it would minimise civilian casualties.”³⁹

The next day, however, the police dispersed a major anti-American protest by Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) in front of the parliament building in Jakarta. There was violence on both sides, and more than a dozen people were injured when the police broke up the demonstration. It seemed that the message was clear. The government would not tolerate further threats to social order and its international reputation. Vice-President Hamzah Haz, who had been

critical of American policy after September 11, by mid-October was toning down his rhetoric and downplaying differences between his own and Megawati's positions.⁴⁰ Within days, the sights of anti-American protesters calling for jihad disappeared from the streets of Jakarta and other major cities. Habib Raziq, leader of FPI and the most vocal opponent of the American campaign in Afghanistan, began to tone down his rhetoric and now filed a lawsuit against the police, claiming that the police had violated his human rights. He also publicly stated that FPI members had not searched for foreigners and would not do so in the future, maintaining that "the issue is only talks."⁴¹

Regardless of the effects of the speech on the streets in Jakarta, the change of tone in the Megawati government's position inevitably attracted reaction from abroad. A strong criticism was soon directed at Megawati's speech by Australia, a close American ally in the Pacific. Prime Minister John Howard remarked that the speech could bring instability to the Asia-Pacific region.⁴² Meanwhile, the response in Washington was decidedly muted, although some government officials saw the remarks as being "not helpful." White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer simply commented on Megawati's criticism by saying that "the best defense [against terrorism] is a strong offense."⁴³ And, unlike PM Howard, US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage downplayed the remarks, saying that he believed that Indonesia would continue to be supportive of the USA.⁴⁴ However, one American analyst simply labelled Megawati's speech as an instance of "hypocrisy."⁴⁵ For others, Megawati's criticism "was largely meant for internal consumption."⁴⁶ Indeed, the modification in the Indonesian attitude constituted a form of compromise that President Megawati had to take amid strong reactions from some Islamic circles.

That compromise was also displayed in the Indonesian attitude towards the US-led global war on terrorism. Indeed, despite a significant decrease in overt anti-American sentiments on the streets of Jakarta, the Indonesian government continued to stress its opposition to the American military campaign in Afghanistan. Coordinating Minister for Political, Social, and Security Affairs Let.Gen (ret.) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, for example, warned that the US-led attacks on Afghanistan could spark a clash of civilisations. Yudhoyono feared that "if this conflict widens, then many countries will be destabilized. This will create a new unwanted conflict, for example the West against non-Western countries, the United States versus the rest of the world." He also maintained that despite Indonesia's support to the efforts to combat terrorism, it saw the use of excessive military force by the USA as counterproductive.⁴⁷

At the end of October, President Megawati called on the USA to stop its bombings of Afghanistan, especially during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and Christmas. Speaking at the opening of the MPR Annual Session, she maintained that "prolonged military action is not only counter-productive but also can weaken the global coalition's joint effort to combat

terrorism.”⁴⁸ She also stated that “we call for the need for a humanitarian pause to provide an opportunity to handle humanitarian aspects, and to find a way to find a solution via political and diplomatic means.”⁴⁹ She also demanded that the USA offer proof that Osama bin Laden was responsible for the September 11 attacks. Megawati reminded the USA that “it is an obligation of every party to help find and show to the world the convincing evidence of connection of any elements allegedly involved in these irresponsible actions before taking measures to combat terrorism.”⁵⁰

Indonesia displayed its uneasiness with the US-led coalition against terrorism when Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda, speaking during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Shanghai, maintained that Indonesia wanted to see the United Nations take the leading role and initiate a collective response in combating international terrorism.⁵¹ After meeting with US Secretary of State Colin Powell, Foreign Minister Wirayuda stated that his government believed “a collective international response” to the September 11 terrorist attacks was preferable to unilateral US military action.⁵² Indonesia’s reluctance to fully become part of an American-led coalition against terrorism was also evident when the USA demanded that every country took necessary measures to freeze financial assets of organisations suspected to have links with international terrorism.

Again, domestic political calculation seemed to have played an important role here. For Indonesia, the US demand, despite being backed by UN Resolution No. 1333/2000 and No. 1373/2000, presented the government with a difficult dilemma. As noted by Sheldon Simon, “to scrutinize [Islamic charities] in Indonesia risks a significant Muslim backlash. Moreover, neither the Finance Ministry nor Bank Indonesia is equipped to monitor the thousands of financial transactions coming from overseas to nongovernmental organizations.”⁵³ The reality on the ground, however, was murkier than Simon suggested. Even after Indonesia agreed to undertake investigation, after a long delay, responses from Indonesian officials to the request were still marked by a degree of reluctance and resentment. The Governor of Central Bank, for example, responded to the request by saying that it was easier said than done. Cabinet Minister Yusril Ihza Mahendra of the Islamic-based Moon and Star Party (PBB) maintained that “we cannot just freeze those assets unless we have solid evidence.”⁵⁴

In general, however, Indonesia came to be seen as not being interested in pursuing the issue of terrorism. Some US officials criticised Indonesia, accusing it of being too slow, and uncooperative.⁵⁵ An American analyst bluntly stated that “the Americans are keeping a scorecard for what is being done in Asia. Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines are getting almost-perfect scores for reining in the terrorists.” In contrast, “the Indonesians have got a big fat goose egg for not trying hard enough.”⁵⁶ Pressure on Indonesia “to do more,” however, began to mount when an Indonesian national, Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi, was arrested in Manila for illegally keeping tons of explosive materials.

Later, al-Ghozi confessed that he was a member of Jemaah Islamiyah group, which is believed to have maintained close ties with Al-Qaeda.⁵⁷ Following the arrest of al-Ghozi, Malaysian police also arrested members of the Malaysian Mujahidin Group (Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia, KMM). An Indonesian Muslim cleric, Abu Bakar Baashir, the leader of Yogyakarta-based Indonesian Mujahideen Council (MMI), was accused as the founder of the organisation.

Malaysia and Singapore officials were convinced that Abu Bakar Baashir is also the head of Jemaah Islamiyah group. Malaysian authorities have long been trying to imprison him on the charge that he was the main figure behind the militancy of the KMM movement.⁵⁸ The KMM is also accused of being behind the attempt to overthrow the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad and to set up an Islamic state in Malaysia. The KMM was also reportedly involved in the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Ambon by providing money to fund the Muslim side in Ambon, which was valued at 225 million rupiah.⁵⁹ However, Indonesia continues to deny and reject allegations that “Indonesia was home to groups or individuals who were part of a regional terrorist network.”⁶⁰ Government officials also rejected allegations about possible links between Indonesian radical groups and international terrorist networks.

Fear of a backlash from Muslim groups in the country seems to be the reason for such denial. President Megawati seems to realise that a showdown with her coalition partners over the war on terrorism was not worth the effort. As discussed earlier, Vice-President Hamzah Haz has been one of the most ardent critics of US military action in Afghanistan. Hamzah’s comments on the issue put Megawati in a difficult position vis-à-vis the larger Islamic community. He, for example, maintained that “it is our obligation to help Afghanistan because it is a Muslim country” and “the demands of the Muslim people here have been echoed by the government.”⁶¹ In order to avoid an overt tension within the government, President Megawati had no other choice but to compromise by becoming more critical of the American military campaign in Afghanistan. In that context, therefore, Indonesia’s critical attitude of the USA was driven more by the domestic political interests of the regime than by the regime’s belief in the need to project co-religious solidarity values.

Indeed, Indonesia’s opposition to the American campaign in Afghanistan served as a declaratory form of foreign policy meant to appease domestic pressure at home. President Megawati did not make any reference to Islam as the basis of her criticism of the American campaign in Afghanistan. Nor did she propose any concrete action to follow up her government’s position. On the contrary, the substance of Megawati’s foreign policy continued to recognise the importance of the USA for Indonesian national interests. The government, for example, rejected the demand by Islamic groups that Indonesia break up its diplomatic ties with the USA in order to show its solidarity with fellow Afghan Muslims. Responding to such demands,

Coordinating Minister for Political, Social, and Security Affairs Susilo Bambang Yudoyono, for example, warned that “we should not resort to emotional responses.”⁶² Foreign Minister Wirayuda also criticised the demands as “emotional and not proportional” and warned that the severance of diplomatic ties with the USA would make Indonesia the most radical state, even compared to radical Arab countries.⁶³

The episode once again demonstrates the nature of Islamic influence upon Indonesian foreign policy, especially in the post-Suharto era. Indonesia’s response to September 11 revealed that while the government recognised the importance of the Islamic factor, it refused to be dictated by it. While that recognition was accommodated through a declaratory form of criticism against the USA, the substance of foreign policy continues to be defined by domestic political and economic interests rather than by the call for expressing co-religious solidarity with the Taliban regime. And, more importantly, the government position was also strongly supported by the majority of Muslim leaders in the country. In other words, despite the call from some Muslim groups for a greater co-religious solidarity, domestic priorities and interests remained the most important determinants of Indonesian foreign policy. And, those priorities and interests set the limit within which Islamic influence in foreign policy can be expressed.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the nature of the Indonesian government under President Megawati, the place of Islam in politics, and the extent to which her foreign policy has or has not been influenced by Islamic considerations. Given the political circumstances during which Megawati was appointed as Indonesia’s fifth president, she was obliged to make a political compromise resulting in the formation of a coalition government between her secular-nationalist group and Islam. That marriage of convenience, however, failed to put the question of state identity to rest. In fact, some Islamic political parties and Muslim groups, including the party led by her Vice-President, went on with their effort to change Indonesia’s “neither secular nor theocratic” identity into an identity more in tune with Islam. Such efforts continue to serve as a reminder about the dilemma of dual identity facing the Indonesian state.

Indonesia under President Megawati also continues to reflect a reality of domestic weakness. The nature of her coalition government itself clearly demonstrates the fragility of Indonesian politics marked by the revival of competing ideological preferences, especially between secular-nationalism and Islam, within a highly competitive post-authoritarian political system. That fragility is then exacerbated by the enduring economic hardships that force the government to rely on the international community, especially the West. The agenda, priorities, and the conduct of Megawati’s foreign policy,

like the foreign policy of her predecessors, continue to be defined and dictated by that reality of domestic weakness.

On taking over power from President Wahid in July 2001, President Megawati sought the return of conventional agendas into Indonesian foreign policy. For Megawati, the main function of foreign policy is to serve national interests and agendas. In that context, rather than pursuing a new course in foreign policy, the Megawati government reiterated Indonesia's commitment to prioritise its relationships according to concentric circles of interests. Within such circles, the first priority is given to fostering good relationships with its neighbouring states in Southeast Asia as the most important circle of political and security interests, and then Northeast Asia and the United States as the most important circle of economic interests. The return to the concentric circle concept clearly reaffirms Indonesia's place in, and proximity with, the Asia-Pacific rather than with the Arab-Islamic world. With such agendas and priorities, the non-religious character of foreign policy was preserved and reinforced.

The influence of Islam, however, is not entirely absent, nor can it be ignored altogether. As her government itself was a product of delicate and precarious political compromise between secular-nationalism and Islam, the imperative of such a balancing act would continue to be a political necessity. In foreign policy, the imperative of political compromise, that serves the purpose of recognising the Islamic factor on the one hand and maintaining the interests of regime and the government on the other, requires a similar balancing act. Indeed, the nature of Islamic expression in foreign policy under President Megawati, as a result of this delicate balancing act, was well demonstrated in the case of the Indonesian response to September 11 and subsequent American retaliation against Al-Qaeda and Afghanistan.

The importance of domestic priorities and regime interests initially led President Megawati to express full support to the USA. However, the growing significance of Islam in domestic politics forced President Megawati to make some political compromises. That compromise was undertaken through a display of a critical view against the US military campaign in Afghanistan. At the same time, however, the government also ensured that the compromise would not go so far that it sacrificed the political and economic interests of the regime. The government firmly rejected the demands by some Islamic groups that Indonesia sever its diplomatic ties with the USA. In that context, the Islamic factor, while clearly functioning as a brake that forced the government to make some compromises, was not allowed to dictate the overall substance of foreign policy. Just as under the previous governments, Islam continues to play a secondary role in Indonesian foreign policy under President Megawati. And, that secondary role reflects the dilemma of dual identity and the reality of domestic weakness that continue to characterise the Indonesian state.