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Obama Suka Nasi Goreng! American Foreign Policy and Cultural Affinity with Indonesia

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OBAMA SUKA NASI GORENG!

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY AND CULTURAL AFFINITY WITH INDONESIA

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Foreword

I chose to research US foreign policy towards Indonesia, specifically United States cultural programs that aim to increase cultural affinity between the two countries. Top diplomats, including the ambassadors from America and Indonesia have agreed on the need for person-to-person relationships to foster bilateral goodwill, so the next step is the actual implementation of programs to that end. This paper will focus on answering three questions central to US foreign policy towards Indonesia:

1. What are the major roadblocks that currently prevent the United States and Indonesia from becoming closer linked strategically, economically and culturally?
2. Which socio-cultural programs are most effective at overcoming these roadblocks?
3. What elements should future cultural programs include in order to generate goodwill towards the United States?

While I realize the limited scope of my research restricts me from making broad generalizing claims about Indonesian attitudes, my research serves a normative function in laying out standards for what future cultural programs should look like.

Research Focus

Recognizing that Indonesian policy towards the US also serves an important purpose in the bilateral relationship, I chose to focus my research on American foreign policy programs for three reasons.

First, in my experience, the average Indonesian knows a lot more about America than the average American knows about Indonesia. Perhaps due to America's mass media reach, Hollywood's cultural hegemony, or President Obama's education in Indonesia, the Indonesians I came into contact with knew basic facts about America. Indonesians would likely be able to locate America on a map, identify a few key states (New York, California and Texas) and name the current American president, which could not be said about Americans asked about Indonesia.

Second, the relationship between the United States and Indonesia tends not to be an equal relationship of partners. As I will explain, American and Indonesian 'joint ventures' often turn into transactional exchanges, with the US providing capital or material assistance in exchange for cooperation on security or trade issues. Bilateral programs tend to be led and dominated by the United States, which commands the lion's share of the wealth and resources, both physical and political. As such, Indonesian action towards the United States is often constrained.

Third, as Indonesia is the staging ground for American foreign policy programs, and America for Indonesian programs, it is easier to study American foreign policy abroad. As my research lent itself to a cultural-lens observation of US foreign policy, it was more appropriate to focus on programs in Indonesia, where I was able to

interview program participants, practitioners and diplomats who were actually involved in the “nitty gritty” of program implementation.

Throughout this essay, I will refer to the goals of US-led cultural programs in Indonesia as generating “cultural affinity.” I define this term as the degree to which culture makes achieving foreign policy goals easier, as opposed to more difficult. For the purpose of this analysis, *cultural affinity* suggests the ease of generating good will and a sense of friendship towards the United States among the Indonesian public.

Introduction

This essay will first focus on the historical legacy of United States foreign policy towards Indonesia, arguing that security exigencies and military-to-military linkages have historically driven the US-Indonesian relationship. I will also briefly explain the current diplomatic consensus of how best to “broaden” the US-Indonesia bilateral relationship. The second section will explain roadblocks towards strengthening the relationship, including strategic, economic and cultural barriers to cultural affinity. The third and final section will use public opinion polling data and collected primary source information in order to make recommendations about how to implement future US-led cultural programs in Indonesia.

Section One: The Historical Dimension

Birth of a Bilateral Relationship

The United States' relationship with Indonesia began shortly after Indonesia declared its independence from the Netherlands in 1949. During the early 1950's, Indonesian parliaments were frustrated with growing unrest and an inability to effectively govern because of inadequate police forces.¹ As a result of political turbulence in Indonesia, the Indonesian government was forced to re-prioritize their foreign policy objectives. While the founding fathers of Indonesia had originally developed a foreign policy that was "*bebas aktif*," or "*free and active*," Indonesia increasingly relied on US security assistance, nudging the country further from its official stance of non-alignment. The United States was happy to provide military and economic aid to Indonesia, as it fell neatly into their 1950's foreign policy strategy of "containment." The United States, fearing that the fall of strategic "domino" states to communism might cause other states to follow suit, committed to fighting the communist influence around the world in developing battleground states like Indonesia. Conveniently, the Indonesian governments in the early 1950's were also suspicious that the USSR had bankrolled communist revolts in Indonesia, and happily accepted over five million dollars in direct military aid from the United States.²

¹ Richard Mason, "Indonesia, the Cold War and Non-Alignment: Relations of the Early Indonesian Cabinets with the United States, 1950-52," *Journal of International Studies* 6(2010).

² Ibid.

Cold War Policy

The Cold War continued to have a massive influence on US policy towards Indonesia. As Indonesia is located at the strategic crossroads of the Malacca, Lana and Sunda straits, it controls a central hub of the vast energy and commodity Pacific shipping lanes. Additionally, Indonesia's natural resource abundance (including huge deposits of tin, rubber, petroleum and gold) made it an attractive location for the US to exert its influence.³ However, while Indonesia was an appealing prize strategically, the world's Cold War context made it even more desirable. As the United States viewed its own influence as zero sum vis-à-vis USSR influence over developing countries, a victory for the US also meant a crucial defeat for communism. Conversely, communist victory in Indonesia would have meant a defeat for the democratic values and principles nominally championed by the United States during the Cold War.

During the next few decades, President Sukarno's "Guided Democracy," (*Demokrasi Terpimpin*) subverted Indonesia's parliamentary democracy and gradually ceded more and more political control to military elements led by Sukarno. While the United States publically partnered with the Sukarno-led government, they happily increased military aid once Suharto (an anti-communist general,) came to power in a military coup in 1965.⁴ Money and weapons were a small price for the United States to pay for an anti-communist strongman who was

³ F. X. Baskara T. Wardaya, "A Cold War Shadow: United States Policy toward Indonesia, 1953--1963" (Ph.D., Marquette University, 2001).

⁴ Bruce Vaughn, "Indonesia: Domestic Politics, Strategic Dynamics, and U.S. Interests," *US Congressional Research Service* 7, no. 5700 (2011).

not afraid to suppress political dissidents. All in all, over 500,000 Indonesians lost their lives in the years after Suharto's coup in a series of ruthless mass killings.⁵ In this respect, the United States demonstrated that it was more concerned with maintaining a security and strategic relationship with Indonesia than it was with promoting liberal values and democracy abroad. This revealed an evident schism between American rhetoric and actual American policies around the world. I will later discuss how this hypocrisy negatively influences the attitudes of modern Indonesians, who recognize American duplicity in promoting democracy abroad while ignoring the US's historical support for Suharto, a brutal and illiberal military dictator.

Conscientious Objection

After the Cold War ended, the United States was once again quick to condemn Indonesia for human rights abuses within its borders. The main area of dispute occurred in 1991, when the Indonesian military summarily executed over 700 pro-independence citizens of Timor-Leste during the "Santa Cruz Massacre."⁶ Following the massacre, the United States used military aid as a lever through which to influence Indonesian policy, temporarily suspending the International Military Education and Training program, the official grant mechanism for dispensing aid to Indonesia. Sanctions of the Indonesian military and security apparatus continued until the late 1990's. It is also important to note that the United States

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ted Osius Murray Hiebert, Gregory B. Poling. , "A Us-Indonesia Partnership for 2020,"(Center for Strategic and international Studies, 2013).

minimally emphasized economic engagement with Indonesia, and even less so cultural people-to-people programs. The US relationship with Indonesia remained primarily focused on security exigencies and military aid through the early 1990's.

“A Day That Will Live in Infamy”

The events on September 11, 2001, represented a major shock to US policymakers, who were forced to quickly reorder their strategic and national security priorities. Many Muslims in Indonesia were quick to distance themselves from the attackers, quickly emphasizing their commitments to peace and expressing their shock that Muslims could possibly commit such heinous acts.⁷ In what would later become known as President Bush's National Security Strategy, President Bush emphasized two key goals; regional stability and cooperation among democratic countries around the world.⁸ With a new imperative to reach out to other democracies, especially those with Muslim majorities, President Bush committed to increased military cooperation between the US and Indonesia. In the name of fighting terrorism after the 2002 Bali bombing (by the al-Qaeda linked Indonesian terrorist group *Jemaah Islamiyah*,) the US ratcheted up its support for the Indonesian military in the form of a \$23 million aid package. In the 5 years after

⁷ Jane Song, Personal Interview, April 16 2014.

⁸ George W Bush, "National Security Strategy of the United States," news release, 2006.

9/11, US aid to Indonesia in dollar terms (primarily focused on security and economic development) increased by more than 50%.⁹

The Obama Years

After Obama's election in 2008, Indonesians celebrated with impromptu street parties, joyous that the American president would have experience with Indonesia, having gone to school in Jakarta. President Obama took advantage of his grassroots popularity by lining up a visit to Indonesia in 2010, during which he declared his love for *bakso* and *sate ayam*.¹⁰ While this statement of cultural affinity was sufficient in the minds of the average Indonesian to fulfill President Obama's commitment of goodwill towards Indonesia, Obama also sought to institutionalize the relationship through the promotion of a new comprehensive partnership. Announcing that pressing economic interests had prompted Presidents Obama and SBY to re-examine the US-Indonesian bilateral relationship, the presidents revealed a three-prong strategy to strengthen the relationship. Focusing on security, economics and trade, and socio-cultural issues, the Comprehensive Partnership of 2010 was a major turning point that symbolized the Obama administration's commitment to emphasizing economic and cultural matters as important areas of interest.^{11 12} The first prong, security, reified US commitments to defense

⁹ Diane Mauzy and Brian L. Job, "Us Policy in Southeast Asia," *Asian Survey* 47, no. 4 (2007).

¹⁰ Audrey Mint, Personal Interview, April 24 2014.

¹¹ US Department of State Office of the Spokesperson, "United States Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership," news release, July 24, 2011.

cooperation and military-to-military linkages and cooperation, especially on counter-terrorism initiatives. The second prong focused on increased economic integration, aiming to increase two-way trade and investment, while also encouraging Indonesian participation in multilateral economic initiatives like the World Trade Organization and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. The third prong focused on educational, socio-cultural and scientific ends, aiming to incentivize student exchanges, joint research and diversity awareness programs.

As a result of the Comprehensive Partnership, security cooperation continued to flourish, as the US continued to supply weapons and training to the Indonesian military. However, economic investment grew anemically, with new US investment only totaling 5% of new investment in Indonesia in 2011.¹³ At recent presentations in Washington DC, the top diplomats from Indonesia and the United States agreed that while security cooperation between the US and Indonesia remains strong, American-led economic and cultural programs are largely failing to take root in Indonesia.¹⁴ In a new proposal endorsed by both of the Indonesian and US ambassadors, the ambassadors recommend reinvigorating the third prong of the comprehensive partnership (cultural) in order to jumpstart the second (trade and investment). Leading a modest campaign to increase student exchanges, educational grants, people-to-people programs and the Peace Corps presence in Indonesia,

¹² Barack H. Obama, "Remarks at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta,"(2010).

¹³ Murray Hiebert, "Comprehensive Partnership Nudges Us-Indonesia Relations to New Levels of Cooperation," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (2012).

¹⁴ Scot Marciel, "Us-Indonesia Partnership for 2020,"(Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2013).

diplomats are crafting a strategy to more durably link Indonesia and the United States closer together. The existing diplomatic consensus means that emphasis will likely be placed on educational person-to-person programs aimed at generating goodwill towards the United States.

Conclusion

The United States bilateral relationship with Indonesia has gone through a process of growth and development. Beginning as an instrumental relationship in which US aid to Indonesia aimed to curb the spread of communism, the two countries became increasingly connected through military linkages. After the Cold War, the United States occasionally exerted its influence to promote liberal values and human rights, but the relationship remained focused on security concerns. However, the Obama administration has at least nominally committed to broadening the relationship and emphasizing economic and cultural programs, not just security linkages. The future of the US-Indonesia relationship will likely see increased emphasis on socio-cultural programs aimed at generating goodwill towards the United States, due to a consensus of top policymakers. Section two of this essay will focus on areas of contention that may influence the implementation of these programs.

Section Two: Roadblocks to Strengthening the Bilateral Relationship

Section two will focus on the sources of friction between the United States and Indonesian cultures as they relate to foreign policy. First I will examine inconsistencies in knowledge about American lifestyles and values, and how they might influence Indonesian perceptions about the United States. These knowledge gaps make it difficult for US programs to generate general goodwill within Indonesia. Then, I will discuss the US-Indonesia relationship from a policy perspective, especially locating my analysis on Indonesian attitudes on American hypocrisy and double standards in US foreign policy.

“Saya Suka Nasi Goreng” and “The Cool Factor”

According to American English teacher and PhD analytic writing tutor Matt Liberace, the first question on every Indonesian person’s mind is about president Obama.¹⁵ Owing to Obama’s affinity and educational history in Indonesia, Indonesians in general love bringing up his preferences for *nasi goreng* and *bakso*. While this is certainly a superficial statement about the nature of the strength of US-Indonesian relations, it serves as a vital jumping-off point of analysis for a discussion of Indonesian cultural affinity towards the US. While there is not much political depth to the average Indonesian person’s enthusiasm about Obama’s diet, that same enthusiasm represents the power of the food, culture and lived experience to create real empathy and attraction. Although Obama isn’t the only US

¹⁵ Matt Liberace, Personal Interview, April 24 2014.

issue on Indonesian's mind, the fact that he comes into conversations first and foremost speaks volumes to the power of shared culture.

While Indonesian comments about Obama may be superficial, according to Liberace, shifting cultural trends have minimized the American cultural role in Indonesian everyday life. Today, young people in Indonesia are more likely to think of the UK, Korea and France as "hip," as other countries around the world develop their own cultural exports.¹⁶ For example, the meteoric rise in popularity of Korean boy-bands and "K-pop" indicate that while Hollywood is still relevant, the US is facing peer competitors who increasingly have more cultural purchasing power. The rise of Asian and European cultural products has taken the spotlight off of American culture. This shift in what is "cool" has also been coupled with an increasing affinity with other Muslim countries. Since Muslim Indonesians in general have felt assaulted by Western culture, many see increased solidarity and closeness with other Muslim cultures as a solution.¹⁷

The Knowledge Gap

Indonesians, often basing their assessments of American culture on reality television shows on MTV or the indulgent lifestyles of Hollywood movie stars, may come away with a warped perception of American values. The American cultural hegemon, Hollywood, entertains not only Americans but also watchers from around the world, including Indonesians. As a result, Indonesian knowledge about American

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Song.

lifestyles is often inaccurate. Indonesians are often unaware of American social ills like homelessness, believing instead that all Americans are wealthy.¹⁸ Since the majority of Hollywood actors are homogenous, white, rich Americans, Indonesians understandably create stereotypes about what the average American lifestyle must be like.¹⁹ While most Americans watching “Jersey Shore” understand that the show is contextualized by an entertainment media that fetishizes the extreme, and are amused by the freak-show aspect of extreme behavior, Indonesians lack that context, and may form generalizing assumptions about all Americans.

Religion in Indonesia, which plays a massive role in both everyday life and national identity, is sometimes also a nexus point for misunderstandings. According to Jane Song, an American masters degree candidate in Interfaith Relations, many Muslims in Indonesia feel skeptical about US attitudes towards Islam:

“There are events of Islamophobia that have reached the news here – they’re confused as to why Americans feel this way about Muslims. For example – the mosque at ground zero, which was not a mosque and was not at ground zero, the rhetoric surrounding that fiasco reached here. They’re also curious about the treatment of Muslims after 9/11. They see the anti-sharia legislation that’s in 20 states right now. If all you hear is rhetoric that is hostile to Muslims, of course that has an impact.”²⁰

Additionally, differences in religious values create skepticism about American morals and standards. Indonesians are often only exposed to Americans wearing revealing clothing, in different styles than are culturally appropriate in Indonesia²¹.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Mint.

²⁰ Song.

²¹ Liberace.

This trend, along with Hollywood dramatizations of Americans' sex lives, has led many Indonesians to think that America is a "loose" country where people freely have sex without concern for religious values or standards of decency.²² While this attitude is not entirely accurate, it is understandable how Indonesians with limited exposure to US lifestyles may come to these conclusions, based on the limited evidence available to them.

Hypocrisy and Double Standards

While cultural differences between Indonesia and the United States come as the result of incomplete knowledge or different values, there are also important points of contention that deal with official US foreign policy. As outlined in the first chapter, the US-Indonesia relationship has often been security-centric, which has led many Indonesians to believe that it is transactional. This is bolstered by the fact that US foreign policy is often hypocritical to its stated values, in short, failing to "walk the walk" on liberal democracy.²³ While paying lip service to the value of democracy, the United States has installed dictatorial regimes in places like Egypt, Iran, Guatemala and Haiti. According to Song, "[Indonesians] are aware of hypocrisy between what the US says and what it does with regards to the rest of the world. The US doesn't like democracy when it doesn't work well for us economically."²⁴ What's more, the US domestic political issues are often held under the global

²² Song.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

media's magnifying glass, making it difficult to idealize the US as a model democratic state. The United States is still figuring out democracy at home. The rest of the world sees US elected officials publically speak and act with such vitriol (in highly-publicized events like autumn fall government shutdown) that Indonesians become skeptical about the validity of American political prescriptions.

In discussing the US-Indonesia relationship, it is also crucial to note the underlying unequal power dynamic between the two states. The United States, as the country with the superior military capability, larger economy and burlier diplomatic might, is able to exert much more influence over Indonesia than Indonesia can over the United States. This dynamic makes it possible for the United States to pursue its own interests with minimal regard to the effects on Indonesian public opinion. As a highly-visible example, the US company Freeport McMoran, a natural resource extrusion company based out of Louisiana, has come under fire for its practices in Papua. Many Indonesians are frustrated that Freeport's gold mine, the largest in the world, is extracting gold in a way that minimally involves local Indonesians. Additionally, the profits are effectively split by the United States, whose GDP is bolstered by Freeport's mining activity, and Jakarta, which benefits from Freeport's paid taxes. The federal government in Jakarta is able to reap financial benefit from Freeport's mining operation without ever facing the direct environmental and human cost of such an operation. Freeport, the largest taxpayer in Indonesia, has been criticized for lax regulation and a disregard for best practice compliance in gold mining.²⁵ American companies like Freeport have been

²⁵ Liberace.

operating in Indonesia since the Suharto era, when Indonesia embraced US-championed economic liberalization policies in an attempt to grow its anemic economy. This allowed international corporations access to Indonesian resources, capital and labor, and also the freedom to operate autonomously provided they continued paying federal taxes.²⁶ Companies like Freeport are supported by the US Chamber of Commerce, which helps American companies compete abroad through diplomatic and trade channels. Since American companies have access to a much more established support network, it is easier for them to compete abroad, sometimes to the detriment of the local populations, as in the case of Freeport. As a result, many Indonesians are skeptical of benevolent US involvement in Indonesia, since some of the most visible US corporations are doing the most damage to Indonesia's natural resources and human capital.

Conclusion

The United States faces many roadblocks in generating pro-US sentiments in Indonesia. Gaps in knowledge, differing values, and exploitative US policies make it difficult for the United States to reach Indonesians and generate cultural affinity for the US. The next and final section will examine public opinion polling data to determine what Indonesians consider important in formulating their opinions about the United States, and will conclude with a discussion of how an ideal cultural program might generate cultural affinity towards the United States.

²⁶ Mint.

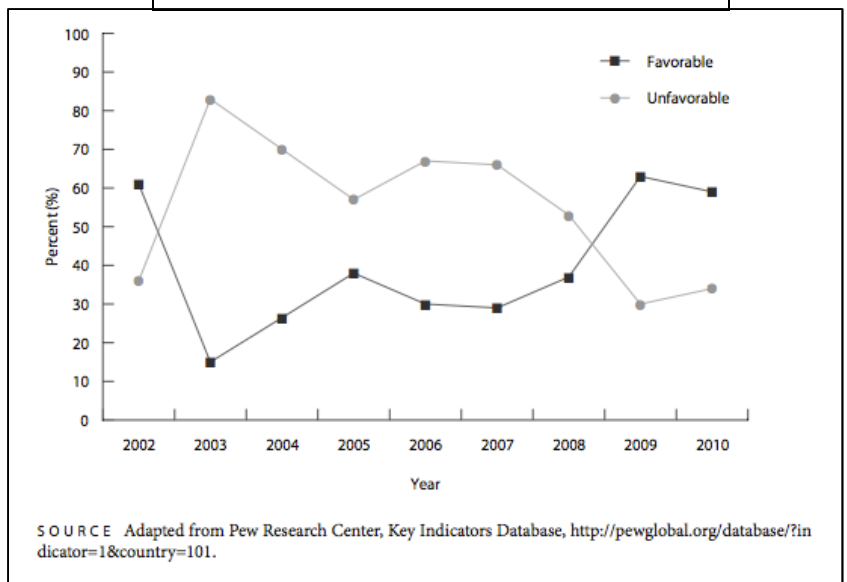
Section Three: Public Opinion and Recommendations for Designing Future Programs

Indonesian Opinions of the United States

The final section of this paper will focus on quantitative measures of Indonesian perceptions of the United States, and will recommend programmatic elements to maximize the success of future cultural programs. According to a personal communication from the Public Affairs Officer of the US Consulate General in Surabaya, the US has primarily “emphasized the promotion of study in the United States, English language acquisition, and various types of cultural programs that lead to people-to-people exchanges.²⁷”

In general, public opinion of the United States in Indonesia has been influenced by two factors – the American president and the bellicosity of American foreign policy, particularly towards the Muslim world and the Middle East. As

Chart 1 – General Opinion of the US

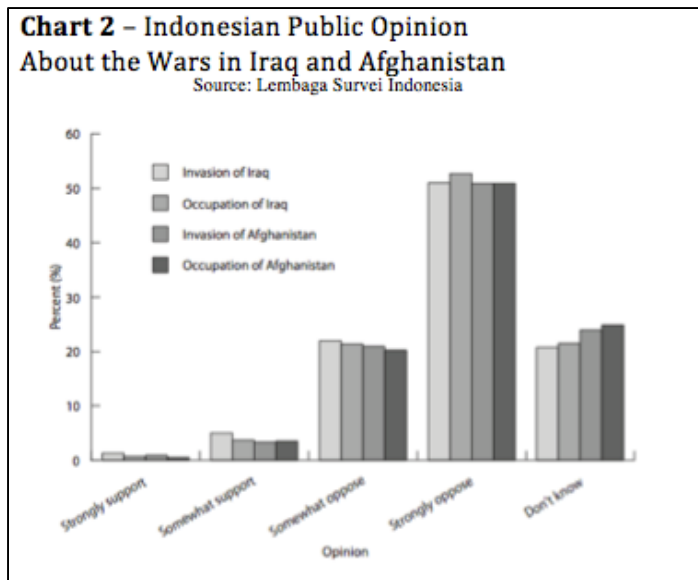


demonstrated in Chart 1, Indonesian’s opinion of America vastly improved following the election of President Obama in 2008.²⁸ While the Bush years saw consistently

²⁷Andrew Veveiros, Personal Interview, 2014.

²⁸ Thomas Pepinsky, "Politics, Public Opinion and the Us-Indonesian Comprehensive Partnership," *The National Bureau of Asian Research NBR Special Report*(2010).

negative attitudes (over 50% answering that they had “unfavorable” opinions about the United States), Obama’s personal connection to Indonesia as well as his decision to visit Jakarta provided a marked bump in public opinion. Perceptions of America during the Bush years were also influenced by American foreign policy abroad, which included an emphasis on combatting terrorism abroad and the invasion of



Iraq in 2003. Indonesian discontent with the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrates that the average Indonesian voter is in tune with, at least generally, the broad strokes of US foreign policy, and feels concerned

about US interventions, perhaps specifically owing to a feeling of religious solidarity (Chart 2).²⁹ These trends are particularly illuminating when considering how public opinion may limit the US’s ability to generate bilateral cultural affinity. As Obama has a unique connection with Indonesia that is unlikely to be replicated by any future president, it is foolish to suggest the US-Indonesia relationship be predicated off the personality of the commander-in-chief. Additionally, as long as the American president is perceived to be anti-Islam or particularly prone to intervention in the Muslim world (like President Bush,) Indonesian are less likely to perceive the US favorably, regardless of the status of cultural programs. While future programs may

²⁹ Ibid.

reach key student demographics, they are unlikely to reach all Indonesians, who may inevitably base their conceptions of the United States on either the attitude of the president or the perceived malevolence of US interventions abroad. This trend supports increased programmatic focus on religion and interfaith dialogue in order to address Indonesian concerns about anti-Islam sentiment and rhetoric coming from the United States.

Current Cultural Programs

The United States and Indonesia, respectively the second and third largest democracies in the world, are continuing to develop their economies and deepen their bilateral relationship. Within this context, it is vital to examine the cultural programs currently in place between the two countries in order to evaluate their effectiveness and make recommendations for the implementation of future programs.

Cultural programs between the United States and Indonesia are dominated by educational exchanges. However, in the realm of higher education study abroad, many Indonesians view the United States as an unattractive destination.

Increasingly choosing to study in Singapore, Canada or the United Kingdom, many Indonesians are looking for countries they perceive to be friendlier to Islam.³⁰

However, under the leadership of Presidents Obama and SBY, the US-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership provides over \$160 million to fund higher-education exchanges, which include Fulbright programs, STEM research transfers, and USAID

³⁰ Song.

scholarships.³¹ The Fulbright English language instruction program, the largest in the world, has educated nearly 100,000 Indonesian students over the past decade.³² Nearly one hundred Americans are working in Indonesia through the Peace Corps, newly renewed after participants were expelled in 1965 (after being accused by Indonesia of spying). Through English language instruction and cross-cultural dialogue between American and Indonesian students, governmental and NGO programs are effective in creating people-to-people contact and engaging students culturally. Since 2010, the amount of visas issued to Indonesian students has also risen by over 25%, aided by a consular program called @america which helps Indonesian students through the confusing visa application process.³³

US-led cultural programs are making a modest impact on cultural affinity between the United States and Indonesia. According to the Consulate General, “to determine whether these programs are successful requires assessing the initiatives over time, and quite possibly it is too early to reach any conclusions.”³⁴ Additionally, according to ex-Indonesian ambassador Dino Djalal, the anemic economic integration of the two economies is largely due to insufficient cultural exchange programs, and the fact that Indonesians and Americans are largely unaware of and uninterested in the other country’s culture.³⁵ The following sub-section will use

³¹ Murray Hiebert, "A Us-Indonesia Partnership for 2020."

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Veveiros.

³⁵ Dino Djalal, September 25, 2013, Panel Discussion.

lessons learned from these programs in order to recommend attributes for future programs, in order to strengthen the US-Indonesian relationship to the benefit of both countries.

Attributes of an Ideal Cultural Exchange Program

First, an ideal cultural program would focus on areas of demonstrated need in Indonesia. One such area is education, in which Indonesia might seriously benefit from a slew of native English speakers who could help students with language instruction. As the Indonesian educational system is regarded as one of the worst in the world, educational programs would both fill a need for language instructors, and strengthen the bilateral relationship by providing vital person-to-person contact.³⁶ Educational programs should also be implemented in order to increase best practice sharing, technology and curriculum transfers, and capacity building in Indonesian schools, along with the goal of generating cultural affinity. Another such area of demonstrated need is sustainability and natural resource use. As focus on sustainability in Indonesia is inappropriately low, recycling and other sustainability programs are failing due to a lack of attention and knowledge.³⁷ Indonesia is the fourth largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, and US-Indonesian cultural programs might serve an additional purpose of helping to reduce both countries' emissions and pollution. Effective cultural programs will show genuine American

³⁶ Liberace.

³⁷ Ibid.

interest in Indonesian culture while reinforcing American commitments to actually address areas of Indonesian need.

Next, an ideal cross-cultural program should also include religious training and cross-cultural experiential learning. In addition to the previously explored misunderstandings about American lifestyles and values, Indonesians often misunderstand concepts of secularity, thinking it is an exclusively anti-religious sentiment.³⁸ Islam and America's Judeo-Christian culture share an Abrahamic background, a strong tradition of orthodoxy (as opposed to orthopraxy) and shared prophets, which could provide students common ground upon which to base a conversation.³⁹ Additionally, the prominence of Muslim mass organizations, including Muhammadiyah and NU (which include a combined 80 million members) makes them an ideal staging ground to reach huge Indonesian audiences.⁴⁰ Muhammadiyah has already seen success in briefing Peace Corps volunteers before their service trips, and helping to implement with USAID public health programs.⁴¹

Finally, future cultural programs should follow an innovative, technology driven approach like that of @america. In the current consular program, young Indonesians have access to a high-tech interactive display kiosk at a mall in Jakarta, which provides information about topics relating to America. The kiosk also dispenses personalized advice, especially to Indonesians who want to study abroad

³⁸ Song.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Murray Hiebert, "A Us-Indonesia Partnership for 2020."

⁴¹ Ibid.

in the United States.⁴² As Indonesia is the country with the third highest number of Facebook subscribers and the highest number of twitter users, social media has proven a critical tool in reaching Indonesians, specifically young people. In the case of @america, nearly 60,000 curious Indonesians are receiving information about America on their twitter feeds, removing even the need to physically come to the mall kiosk. Any program aimed at generating goodwill among large groups of Indonesia would wisely consider technology as an important tool with the capability to multiply program effectiveness.

⁴² Ibid.

Conclusion

While the US-Indonesia bilateral relationship has historically underemphasized cultural exchange at the expense of security and military focused programs, the two governments are increasingly focusing on culture as a vital bridge. Programs aimed at generating cultural affinity should emphasize person-to-person contact in order to break down the knowledge gaps that paralyze cultural dialogue. I recommend that American programs focus on areas of Indonesian need, include religious components while involving religious mass organizations, and use technology and social media to reach a wide audience of Indonesians. Although the deepening of the US-Indonesia relationship faces many challenges, there is certainly cause for optimism. Each program aimed at strengthening the bilateral strategic relationship also contains its own reward: warm and enduring personal friendships between Indonesians and Americans.

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Interviews

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Jane Song	UGM	Masters candidate – Interfaith relations	UGM	4/16/14
Andrew Veveiros	Surabaya Consulate General	Public Affairs Officer	E-mail Correspondence	4/20/14
Audrey Mint	Vassar College	Academic Focus	Jogjakarta	4/24/14
Matt Liberace	UNY	English Teacher / PhD writing tutor	Jogjakarta	4/24/14

Note: Pseudonyms were used at the request of interview subjects to protect anonymity