



Clingendael

Netherlands Institute of International Relations

EXPERT SEMINAR REPORT:

Indonesia's Rise and Democracy Promotion in Asia:
The Bali Democracy Forum and Beyond

28 October 2013, The Hague

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Expert Seminar Report

Indonesia's Rise and Democracy Promotion in Asia:

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Date: 28 October 2013

Venue: Clingendael Institute, The Hague

Chair: Professor Jan Melissen of the Clingendael Institute

Speakers: Hassan Wirajuda, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, I Ketut Putra Erawan, Executive Director of Institute for Peace and Democracy, Susanna Mocker and Jan Melissen speaking on behalf of Ellen Huijgh, all of the Clingendael Institute

Participants: 23, Dutch and Indonesian, including representatives from government and academia.

Rapporteurs: Michaël Halans and Danitsja Nassy

This seminar took place under the Chatham House Rule

This expert seminar, which was held in partnership with the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, set out to discuss the challenges of democracy development in Indonesia and the Asia-Pacific region, and the international strategy of Indonesia as an ambitious power in the world's fastest rising region. Four experts each presented a brief introduction on their area of interest, ranging from 'the Bali Democracy Forum', 'the Institute for Peace and Democracy', 'Indonesia's Strategic Repositioning' to 'Indonesia's Public Diplomacy'. An in-depth discussion with all participants followed. The central question is how Indonesia will continue to foster the development of democracy in the future. The discussion showed how more dialogue, the further development of Indonesia and the Asia-Pacific region as well as cooperation with and assistance of fellow democracies, such as the Netherlands, helps democracy development.



1. Indonesia: from authoritarian regime to democracy and the BDF

Considering that democracy in Asia is first of all the business of Asians, this seminar had the ambitious goal of improving our understanding on how Asians themselves discuss democracy and democracy promotion, focusing on Indonesia's efforts. Since the start of the *Reformasi* in 1999, Indonesia underwent profound changes in its institutional make up compared to the days of the Suharto regime. Subsequent Indonesian governments in the Post-New Order era have explicitly used the concept of democracy as an element in their public diplomacy and foreign policy. This is quite remarkable considering that in the 1990s, Indonesia was one of the advocates of 'Asian values' and argued that Western views of universal human and political rights were contrary to what was commonly accepted in Asia. Today, democracy is not only embraced as a national value, but also as a value that holds universal appeal. According to Freedom House, Indonesia is the only ASEAN member state which is free in terms of political and civil liberties.

Since 2002, Indonesia embarked on a project to promote democratic values in other ASEAN countries, when it submitted a proposal on the establishment of an ASEAN political and security community in April of that year. Despite heavy opposition, the proposal was endorsed by the ASEAN summit in October 2003, which was a first step to put issues such as democracy, political rights and human rights on the agenda of ASEAN. Even though there was an agreement about the principal of democracy, to put it into practice proved to be much more daunting. Some countries felt that Indonesia was playing a hegemonic role in ASEAN and bullied the other member states. While the traditional understanding of sovereignty and non-interference in domestic issues remained a core principal, the reluctance of ASEAN towards Jakarta's promotion of democracy as core values for Asia lasted. The ASEAN Charter of 2007 proved hardly promising with regard to the promotion of democracy and political rights. This increased the feeling that the Asian paradox would persist, meaning a focus on economic development that is detrimental to political development. In 2008 these factors resulted in the Indonesian government's decision to establish the Bali Democracy Forum (BDF), an inter-governmental forum that is open to all countries of the Asia Pacific. Non-Asian countries can apply for observer status. This should be seen as an important southern contribution to global governance, and is a message for a more balanced approach towards development. Since its inception in 2008 the participation in the BDF has expanded to include more than 50 countries.

In contrast to the George W. Bush initiated 'Asian Pacific Democracy Partnership', both democratic and non-democratic countries are allowed to attend the BDF, which is a clear asset for the latter. Another difference is the way the BDF approaches democracy promotion. Instead of speaking in terms of promotion, which is the American approach of imposing a specific model of democracy upon a country, it might be more accurate to talk about Indonesian democracy 'projection'. The BDF not only



offers the various participants the opportunity to share and learn from each other's best practices and democratic failures, it also tries to build cooperation on human rights and the rule of law. Maybe elections are a western invention but in substance, democracy is a process of continuous dialogue and public reasoning. By using this different approach, the BDF tries to convince others that democracy is also Asian. In addition it improves democracy in Indonesia itself. In this sense the forum can be regarded as proof of the fact that countries can learn from each other thus contributing to peace and security in Asia.

Since more and more people ask for greater political freedom there is a growing awareness among Asian nations, especially those with authoritarian regimes, that some form of democratic reform is necessary. However, such regimes face problems on how to cope with these transitions, especially the timing and means of introduction. Having experienced the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democracy firsthand, Indonesia is well placed to share its thoughts on a possible political development path. Through the delegation of powers to its regions, Indonesia has proven that autonomy is a form of democratization of local governance. By sharing knowledge on how to amend the constitution to make it more democratic or make the military a neutral institution, Indonesia could act as an example for countries that are fearful of democratic reforms, like in the case of Myanmar. With the recent opening of the military regime to democratic reforms, Indonesia has tried to seize the moment and help strengthen the process of change and reform in Myanmar.

Due to a lack of hard power, Indonesia has also used the BDF as a tool to build up its soft power and project its new image to the region and the wider world. As a country with a Muslim majority, Indonesia occupies a unique niche suitable for public diplomacy by linking Islam, democracy and modernity with each other. Despite of its shortcomings on democracy, Indonesia is today able to prove that democracy and Islam are not contradictory but supportive, which is a valuable asset in its foreign policy especially after 9/11. However, it should not be forgotten that domestic issues play an important role for public diplomacy. With an increasing number of human rights violations and even terrorist attacks at home, Indonesia might lose part of its credibility unless it can keep its own house in order.

In tandem with the BDF, the Indonesian government also created the Institute for Peace and Democracy (IPD). Knowing well that democracy is always a work in progress, this institute tries to implement ideas that are based on democratic practices. Through organizing different training programs and workshops, it tries to maintain a sustainable network of countries and other actors, like representatives of civil society and NGOs, who want to work with Indonesia on democracy issues. The most prominent examples of this cooperation over the past few years are probably the Indonesia-Egypt dialogue and the Indonesia-Myanmar dialogue. The IPD also invites various organizations so they can



learn how Indonesia makes democracy and Islam work together, or how countries can support efforts to empower women.

The question whether democracy is more or less a precondition for development or whether developing countries need less freedom in order to stimulate the economy, is a hard nut to crack. Especially with the economic rise of China, ruled by an authoritarian government, more and more developing nations in Asia and beyond are inclined to adopt a comparable development path. Initiatives like the BDF and the ASEAN political and security community are valuable attempts at changing the focus of the debates from economic to political development, by putting forward alternatives in which people have more political and civil rights. Since the 21st century is likely to become the Asia-Pacific century, the answer to this question will have impact on the future of democracy and democracy promotion in this region and beyond.

2. Democracies and its everlasting challenges

ASEAN: From 'crossbeam' to 'wheel barrow' for democracy promotion

With ASEAN at the onset of a new identity in 2002, transforming from a loose association into a community, Indonesia made the quite daring move to project its democratic values upon ASEAN. ASEAN seemed 'allergic' to democracy, and proudly claimed its form of cooperation, compared to equivalent initiatives, as being one of the most successful. In order to strengthen this new ASEAN Community, an ASEAN Economy needed to be established. ASEAN should not compare itself with European institutions and was not to be formed to the likeness of Europe, where democracy, human rights and an open economy were embraced as important principles.

In contrast to Europe and being typically Asian, ASEAN's focus would lie on economy. A different mind-set dominates the Asian domain, which premises stability. If the economy is in order, the development of all other fields, such as democracy and everything that comes with democracy, can be further developed. In this line of thinking, it is very easy to preach about certain things, but the first duty should be to free a country from poverty. Rapid economic progress then makes the promotion of democracy an issue of later concern or even redundant. Development was development, or in the words of Deng Xiaoping: "It doesn't matter whether a cat is white or black, as long as it catches mice."

The process of transforming ASEAN continued with the drafting of a new ASEAN Charter in 2007. By having a 'constitution of ASEAN' all of ASEAN could be 'democratized'. This Charter and the establishment of regional commissions on human rights within ASEAN proved to be quite an ordeal, but by early 2008 it was clear that all principals of democracy promotion and human rights would be enshrined by this new ASEAN Charter. Remarkably, all ten ASEAN members signed the



democratically charged Charter, while four out of the ten ASEAN members were, according to Freedom House's 'Map of Freedom', partly free, whereas 50% falls within the category of 'not free'. Convincing ASEAN or Asian partners on the importance of development was not an easy task. This partly lies in the excessive interpretation of non-intervention on domestic matters. However, 'human rights' is a matter of international concern, and can no longer be claimed as a domestic or ASEAN principle. Do 'Asian Values' include authoritarian tendencies? How can one explain the violation of human rights through Asian values? The key therefore is to make all participants compatible and foster openness. Being a full-fledged democracy since 1999, Indonesia has managed to set itself as an example for countries that fear integration, and has been instrumental in spreading the word.

It is of the essence that the development process gets refined and that mistakes are corrected. Continuous improvement is paramount. Indonesia is well aware of its shortcomings. There remains a barrier on civil and political rights, but the young democracy takes pride in its economic growth in the past fifty years. However, the label of Indonesia bullying or tyrannizing other Asian countries or ASEAN members is considered incorrect. It is merely a matter of Indonesia perceiving itself and ASEAN as strong entities, provided that development persists. The situation in the Middle East and the Arab Spring has been and still is a valuable lesson to Asian countries. Looking at non-democracies, one of the hurdles is the question on how to involve those who are not interested in democracy being the ruling paradigm? Authoritarian governments may feel the need to change, but do not know how to achieve this. What these countries show by admitting to their inability is sheer humanity, and is exactly the reason why they agree to participate in the BDF. Indonesia's status as an Islamic country combined with democracy, in addition to the recognition of difficulties of young nations, adds to its credibility and legitimacy when it comes to the promotion of democracy in the Asian region and Islamic countries. The BDF adds by fostering the congregation of diversity and democracy, and functioning as a springboard to inject democracy and human rights.

Democracy Promotion and the Role of Civil Society

Democracy is more than merely institution building, a form of governing or elections. It is also a way of dealing with public matters, a sense of belonging of the people, and the state's willingness to protect its people. The concept 'democracy' might be considered as a Western invention, but in terms of substance, non-western countries might associate themselves with the concept as a continuing dialogue, where public opinion and public interest matter. One of the strengths of the BDF is that it does not exclude the 'other'. The main purpose is to get everyone around the table and speak on subjects of importance. The BDF is meant as and still is a forum for intergovernmental dialogue. However, the BDF does include NGOs, the media and Anti-Corruption Watch. Regarding prospects



on BDF, development seems to be manoeuvring towards another level, namely the requirement of a pluralistic society, including the strengthening of 'civil society'.

Within Indonesia's foreign policy, 'civil society' is a force to reckon with. Indonesia's public diplomacy is tightly wired into its public policy, very much strategic, and closely linked to foreign policy objectives. The confinement of its public diplomacy discourse within the MFA public diplomacy division clearly reflects this interrelation. Public diplomacy was both a condition and means of foreign policy democratization, with a unique 'double diplomacy' characteristic. This double approach involves both domestic and international audiences into foreign policy. Indonesia has from the outset seen public diplomacy as an operation that is also executed from the domestic, and therefore contains a strong identitary element.

Indonesia's achievement at the economic level is quite remarkable. Its prosperity, which surprised economists in the West, has been the result of a state that manages economic development. However, civil and political rights are in need of advancement. The question whether Indonesia is capable of improving on its dominant public diplomacy narratives, the combination of Islam, democracy and modern society, and its domestic situation remains. In addition, with the strong interrelation of public diplomacy with foreign policy, public diplomacy runs the risk of being stagnated in the MFA.

3. Working Together: The Need for a Strong Indonesia-Netherlands Relationship

The promotion of democracy is one area where both Indonesia and the Netherlands should cooperate with each other. It is in the interest of friends of democracy, such as the Netherlands, to help ensure that Indonesia's initiative of democracy succeeds in other regions. Democracy might be a western concept, but it is also a universal affair and value, which can contribute to peace and security.

With its prominent position within ASEAN, Indonesia could function as a jumping board for the Netherlands to Asia. Indonesia is increasingly viewed by many as an additional 'I' within the BRICS. This could further open the door for Asian interest in Europe. Recently, the relationship between Indonesia and the Netherlands has been shifting, with opportunities for trade and investment becoming more prominent whilst always accompanied by other concerns in this unique bilateral relationship. Dutch Prime-Minister Mark Rutte's visit to Indonesia in November 2013 (20th -22nd), accompanied by a sizeable trade delegation, gives a powerful signal of Dutch willingness to practice and intensify the relationship between the two countries. It is important that both sides explore how they can put their words on building a broader Indonesia-Dutch partnership into reality.



Forming a bridge between East and West is difficult to achieve, but possible in different degrees. For an institution such as the IPD to fully function, cooperation is of the essence. There are several areas where help from European counterparts, such as the Netherlands, is needed. Take for example Thailand, where the rule of the king and class structure prevents democracy from consolidating. Dutch NGOs also have a vital role in, for example, publication, network building, and assistance in research-based programmes, by building knowledge and supporting the capacity building efforts of democracy promoting institutions such as the IPD.

4. Prospects for the future

The political crises following the Arab Spring remind us of the fact that the claim for democratic governance is more universal than some may have thought. One of the causes of the absence of democracy is likely due to imbalanced development. It also reminds us that democracy and democracy promotion is a topic that is relevant today and deserves our attention now and in the future. In order to summarize this seminar, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Asians and Europeans can work together to find ways to minimize the economic and political development gap. The Arab Spring is a reminder that people aspire to be free and political development should be on the agenda. This is currently not the case in much of Asia. Furthermore, we could work closely to find a nexus between democracy and peace to make democracy able to respond to peace issues.
- The inclusive approach used by the BDF to promote democracy, - working with democracies and non-democracies and not force one model of democracy upon a country, - could be inspirational for European countries and the US in order to develop new methods to promote democracy in a world that no longer accepts the Western worldview as a given fact.
- Think tanks in Europe could do valuable work by promoting research on democracy in Asia, so that both Asians and Europeans gain knowledge in order to support their mutual endeavors. Institutions like the IPD in Indonesia could provide the Netherlands with insights regarding issues such as demographic changes.
- Being an important country in the world's most dynamic region, Indonesia could expand on its traditional niche of Islam-democracy-modernity in order to mitigate the danger of democracy fatigue. This does require a more whole-of-government approach on public diplomacy however. Rather than locating diplomacy into one single department, the MFA could mainstream diplomacy and make it the responsibility of all. In the meantime, the Indonesian



approach towards public diplomacy should continue to build on its strengths, like non-governmental participation and interfaith dialogue.

- Finally it is important to address the challenges of civil society participation in the democratization debate, the lynchpin of the BDF. It could create a platform in order to give civil society a voice in this process. A civil society forum could accommodate the goal of making the BDF and democracy promotion more interesting to people. The major target group should be the youth. By inspiring its youth, Indonesia could connect with other countries, whether democratic or non-democratic.

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Colophon

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