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INDONESIA: WILL DEMOCRACY SURVIVE 
AND IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM?

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INDONESIA: WILL DEMOCRACY SURVIVE AND IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After 32 years of autocratic rule, 1998 saw the people of Indonesia embark on a democratic journey. In 2004 the first direct presidential elections were held in the largest single-day election in the world and, despite separatist challenges as well as terrorist acts, democracy would seem to be what Indonesians want. By considering the key issues, this dissertation seeks to establish if the outlook for democracy in Indonesia is indeed secure or if democracy and Islam are fundamentally mismatched. The paper concludes that, whilst Indonesia’s democracy is somewhat unique – in that Islam fits into a democratic process rather than the other way round – Islam and democracy are compatible in the 21st Century, if tolerance, willing and understanding are there.
INTRODUCTION

Is democracy in Indonesia remarkable just because it is home to the world's largest Muslim population? What is true is that its people are a diverse mix of languages and ethnic groupings, perhaps a unique mix in today's modern world. Indonesia has been through the mill, as this paper will show, the country has known revolution, democracy, civil war, autocracy, brutality and murder, as well as military rule – all in just the last 60 years. However, what is clear from the 2009 election results is that Indonesians do not use their democratic right to vote for Islamic parties just because they are Muslim. Indonesia is a country with a distinctive identity, its roots embedded in a deep history of religious and cultural diversity; but with over 300 ethnic groups underpinning its society, Islamic Indonesia has particular challenges to overcome if democracy is to thrive in this young nation.

Indonesia has developed a collective identity defined by a national language, ethnic diversity, religious pluralism within a majority Muslim population, and a history of colonialism including rebellion against it. Indonesia's national motto, ‘Bhinneka Tunggal Ika’ (‘Unity in Diversity’ literally, ‘many, yet one’), encapsulates the value that diversity has in this country’s make-up. The many cultures in this huge archipelago have bred a unique form of Islam – or, rather, many such forms – thriving side-by-side, drawing on the country’s rich pre-Islamic history full of mystery, Buddhism and island gods.

This dissertation will seek to establish whether democracy will survive in the world’s largest Muslim population and thus, whether Islam and democracy are mutually compatible in Indonesia. To do so, as for any paper that seeks to make a strategic assessment of a contemporary issue, analysis inevitably starts with a historical perspective. There is no apology for doing this, as in this case one cannot begin to comprehend and understand the issues that shape Indonesian democracy without touching upon its unique and diverse foundations.

INDONESIA’S EVOLUTION

Indonesia comprises over 17,500 islands and the island of Java is one of the most densely populated islands in the world (see Figure 1). The country has a population of about 240 million – of which 86% are Muslim1, making it the world’s largest Muslim population. Across its many islands, Indonesia consists of distinct ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups; of these, Javanese are the largest and the politically dominant. The population range from rural hunter-gatherers to a modern urban elite and, despite its large population and densely populated regions, Indonesia has vast areas of wilderness that support the world's second highest level of biodiversity. In addition, the country has abundant natural resources but poverty remains widespread in contemporary Indonesia.2

POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

Highly developed kingdoms existed before the Dutch began to colonise Indonesia in the early 17th century. From the 7th century AD, the Srivijaya naval kingdom flourished as a result of the spice trade and the influences of Hinduism and Buddhism that were imported with it.3 Between the 8th and 10th centuries AD, Buddhist and Hindu dynasties both thrived and declined in inland Java, leaving grand religious monuments in their wake. The Hindu Majapahit

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1 US Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Background Note: Indonesia http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2748.htm, Accessed 8 Mar 10, p 1
2 ‘Poverty in Indonesia: Always with them’, The Economist, 14 Sep 06, pp 35-36
3 Jean G. Taylor, Indonesia (London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp 22-26
kingdom was founded in eastern Java in the late 13th century and its influence stretched over much of Indonesia; this period is often referred to as a "Golden Age" in Indonesian history. Although Muslim traders first travelled through Southeast Asia early in the Islamic era, the earliest evidence of Islamised populations in Indonesia dates to the 13th century in northern Sumatra. Other parts of Indonesia slowly adopted Islam, and it became the dominant religion in Java and Sumatra by the end of the 16th century. Generally speaking, Islam overlaid and mixed with existing cultural and religious influences, thus shaping the predominant form of Islam in Indonesia, particularly in Java. The first Europeans arrived in Indonesia in 1512, when Portuguese traders sought to dominate the spice trade. Dutch and British traders were not slow to follow. In 1602 the Dutch established the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and became the pre-eminent European power. Following bankruptcy, the VOC was formally dissolved in 1800 and the Netherlands established the Dutch East Indies as a colony.

[Figure 1 – Indonesia]

**THE LONG ROAD TO DEMOCRACY**

During the first decade of the 20th century, an Indonesian independence movement began and expanded rapidly, particularly between the two World Wars. Its leaders came from a small group of young professionals and students, some of whom had been educated, perhaps somewhat ironically, in the Netherlands. Many, including the man who was to be Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, were imprisoned for their political activities. On 17 August 1945, three days after the Japanese surrender to the Allies, a small group of Indonesians, led by Soekarno, proclaimed independence and established the Republic of Indonesia – Soekarno was appointed president, a post he was to hold until 1967. In effect, colonial rule ended in

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4 Peter Lewis, ‘Insights from history: The next great empire’, *Futures*, Vol 14, Issue 1, Feb ’82, pp 47-61
6 ibid, pp 12-14
7 ibid, pp 22-24
Indonesia when the Japanese occupied the country during WWII and Soekarno along with his fellow ‘revolutionaries’ filled the void that resulted after the subsequent Japanese defeat – but for political reasons not ethnic or religious ones. A provisional government was established and it adopted a constitution to govern the republic until elections could be held and a new constitution written. However, the Netherlands tried to re-establish their rule – a brutal armed and diplomatic struggle resulted which lasted until December 1949, when, in the face of international pressure, the Dutch formally recognised Indonesian independence. 1950 saw Indonesia become the 60th member of the United Nations.

Shortly after hostilities with the Dutch ended in 1949, Indonesia adopted a new constitution, providing for a parliamentary system of government in which the executive was chosen by and accountable to parliament. The constitution embodied five principles of the state philosophy, called ‘Pancasila’, namely: monotheism, humanitarianism, national unity, representative democracy by consensus, and social justice. Even at this early stage, the constitution guaranteed religious freedom to the six religions recognised by the state, namely8 Islam (86%), Protestantism (6%), Catholicism (3%), Hinduism (2%), Buddhism (about 2%), and Confucianism (less than 1%). In Bali, over 90% of the current population is Hindu.9 This early Parliament was divided among many political parties before and after the country's first nationwide election in 1955, and stable governmental coalitions were difficult to achieve. Despite this, observers agree that this was an encouraging, if ultimately ill-fated start for Indonesian democracy, with civilians, who had played a leading role in the independence movement, filling the key positions.10 Indeed, the Indonesian military were largely conspicuous by their absence from the government – even though they had been pivotal in ejecting the Dutch.11

All was not well, however, and early enthusiasm for popular government began to lose its shine. The role of Islam and the rise of Communist Party of Indonesia (the PKI), were becoming a divisive issues. Soekarno defended a secular state based on Pancasila, while some Muslim groups preferred either an Islamic state or a constitution that included a provision requiring adherents of Islam to be subject to Islamic law. With the support of the military, Soekarno implemented a political concept of ‘Guided Democracy’ (Demokrasi Terpimpin) in 1957 to resist these challenges to his power and proposed a cabinet representing all the political parties of importance (including the PKI). This concept was to remain in place until the ‘New Order’ began in 1966. However, unsuccessful rebellions on Sumatra, Sulawesi, West Java, and other islands beginning in 1958, plus a failure by the constituent assembly to develop a new constitution, weakened the embryonic parliamentary system. Consequently, in 1959, when President Soekarno unilaterally revived a provisional 1945 constitution that provided for broad presidential powers, he met little resistance. Western-style parliamentary democracy was effectively finished in Indonesia until the 1999 elections of the Reformasi era.

As time passed and Soekarno’s true colours began to show. Indonesia moved from ‘democracy’ towards authoritarianism as the president underpinned his power base by balancing the opposing forces of the military and the PKI.12 He also moved Indonesia’s foreign policy toward nonalignment, a stance supported by leaders of other former colonies (Afro-Asian) who rejected formal alliances with either the US/West or the Soviet bloc. Under Soekarno’s direction, these leaders met in 1955 at Bandung to lay the groundwork for what became known as the Non-Aligned Movement. Soekarno’s aim, which he more or less

8 Current percentage of the population figures in brackets.
9 US Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, op cit, p 2
11 idem
12 Merle C. Ricklefs, op cit, pp 237-280
achieved, was to enhance Indonesia’s role on the international stage, “the conference transformed the charismatic Soekarno into an international statesman by providing him with a platform on which to demonstrate the fiery anti-colonial rhetoric at which he excelled”. However, despite the PKI being the largest communist party outside the Soviet Union and China, its mass support base never demonstrated an ideological adherence typical of the communist parties in those other countries and its days were to be numbered.

By 1965, the PKI controlled many of the mass civic and cultural organisations that Soekarno had established to mobilise support for his regime and, with Soekarno's acquiescence, embarked on a campaign to establish a ‘Fifth Column’ by arming its supporters. Although army leaders resisted, on 1 October 1965, PKI sympathisers within the military, including elements from Soekarno's palace guard, occupied key locations in Jakarta and kidnapped and murdered 6 senior generals. Major General Soeharto, the commander of the Army Strategic Reserve, rallied army troops opposed to the PKI to re-establish control over the city. Violence swept throughout Indonesia in the aftermath and, although the lack of information makes it difficult to establish an exact number of deaths, scholars suggest the figure is between 200,000 and 500,000. The victims included non-Communists who were slain because of mistaken identity or guilt by association. Time magazine presented the following account on 17 December 1966:

“Communists, Red sympathizers and their families are being massacred by the thousands. Backlands army units are reported to have executed thousands of Communists after interrogation in remote rural jails. Armed with wide-bladed knives called parangs, Moslem bands crept at night into the homes of Communists, killing entire families and burying the bodies in shallow graves. The murder campaign became so brazen in parts of rural East Java that Moslem bands placed the heads of victims on poles and paraded them through villages. The killings have been on such a scale that the disposal of the corpses has created a serious sanitation problem in East Java and northern Sumatra, where the humid air bears the reek of decaying flesh. Travellers from those areas tell of small rivers and streams that have been literally clogged with bodies.”

The emotions and fears of instability created by this crisis persisted for many years and the communist party remains banned from Indonesia to this day. Throughout the 1965-66 period, President Soekarno tried in vain to restore his political grip and shift the country back to its pre-October 1965 position. Although he remained President, in March 1966, Soekarno transferred key political and military powers to General Soeharto, who by that time had become head of the armed forces. In March 1967, the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly (MPRS) named General Soeharto acting President – Soekarno ceased to be a political force and lived under virtual house arrest until his death in 1970.

President Soeharto proclaimed a ‘New Order’ in Indonesian politics in 1966, dramatically shifting foreign and domestic policies away from the course set in Soekarno's final years. The ‘New Order’ established economic rehabilitation and development as its primary goals and pursued its policies through an administrative structure dominated by the military but with advice from Western-educated economic experts. In 1968 Soeharto was formally selected to a full five-year term as President, and he went on to be re-elected to 6 successive 5-year terms. Soeharto’s ‘New Order’ administration was supported by the US government, and encouraged foreign direct investment in Indonesia – which was a major factor in the

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subsequent 3 decades of substantial economic growth. For Soeharto, a perhaps unintended consequence of this period of growth was the rise of the urbanised Indonesian middle class whose prosperity and ambition gradually lead to a demand for transparency and added pressure for democratic change.

Nevertheless, as Soeharto allowed technocrats to run the economy (with considerable success), he also actively encouraged the Indonesian army to get involved in all stages of government, from state down to village level, fostering a culture of oppression and corruption. Furthermore, Soeharto’s ‘transmigration’ programmes – which moved large numbers of landless farmers from Java to other parts of the country – fanned ethnic conflict in this period. In 1997 and 1998, Indonesia was the country hardest hit by the Asian Financial Crisis. This further enflamed popular discontent with the ‘New Order’ and led to mass protests. Soeharto resigned as a result on 21 May 1998 and Indonesia began a remarkable transformation.

INDONESIA TODAY

DEMOCRACY TODAY

The post-Soeharto Indonesia saw the transition from authoritarianism to modern democracy. B J Habibie, Soeharto's Vice-President, became president until October 1999, when Abdurrahman Wahid was elected his successor. After just 21 months in post, Wahid was impeached for participation in financial scandals and replaced by his Vice-President, Megawati Soekarnoputri, (the daughter of Indonesia's first President, Soekarno) in July 2001. The transition was a peaceful one, which was a promising sign that Indonesia was coming to terms with its new democratic system. Under these leaders most of the population gradually enjoyed more and more freedom of expression and opinion, freedom of information, a free press, checks and balances between the executive and the legislature, and a depoliticised military.

Although Indonesia was established as a republic with a presidential system and as a unitary state, power was still firmly concentrated in the central government. Following the resignation of President Soeharto in 1998, Indonesian political and governmental structures underwent major reform. Four amendments to the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia overhauled the executive, judicial, and legislative branches. The president of Indonesia is now the head of state, commander-in-chief of the Indonesian National Armed Forces, and the director of domestic governance, policy-making, and foreign affairs – he or she may serve a maximum of two consecutive 5-year terms. The president appoints the council of ministers, who are not required to be elected members of the legislature. Although the 2004 presidential election was the first in which the people directly elected the president and vice president.

The highest representative body at national level is the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR). Its main functions are supporting and amending the constitution, inaugurating the president, and formalising broad outlines of state policy. It also has the power to impeach the president. The MPR comprises two houses; the People's Representative Council (DPR), with 560 members, and the Regional Representative Council (DPD), with 132 members. Reforms since 1998 have markedly increased the DPR's role in national governance. A strengthening of democratic processes has included a regional autonomy program (see de-centralisation later)

and Indonesia is now the world's third-largest democracy, the world's largest archipelagic state, and home to the world's largest Muslim population.19

Former army General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono won Indonesia’s first-ever direct presidential elections in September 2004, in what was hailed as the first peaceful transition of power in Indonesia’s history – Yudhoyono won 60.6% of the vote. Approximately 76.6% of the eligible voters participated, a total of about 117 million people, making Indonesia's presidential election the largest single-day election in the world.20 Yudhoyono was re-elected in July last year in a landslide victory on the back of improved security and strong growth in Southeast Asia’s biggest economy.

In April 2009, national legislative elections were held. A total of 38 national and 6 local (Aceh only) parties contested the 2009 legislative elections. At least 171 million voters registered to vote in these elections. Voter turnout was estimated to be 71% of the electorate. Yudhoyono’s, ‘Partai Demokrat’, with 20.85% of the vote21, emerged from these parliamentary elections as the largest party.

**INDONESIAN DEMOCRACY: ROLE OF THE MILITARY**

If one asks Indonesians what they think of the current political system in Indonesia, the picture is however far from clear. Interestingly, some see Indonesian politics as being marked by “one step forward and two steps back.”22 What is clear is that the role of the military in Indonesian governance has changed considerably since the country became a democracy in 1998. Prior to 2004, some legislative seats had been reserved for representatives of the armed forces. The military had been a significant political force throughout Indonesian history, though it had ceded its formal political role by 2004. The armed forces shaped the political environment and provided leadership for Soeharto's ‘New Order’ from the time it came to power in the wake of the abortive 1965 uprising. Military officers, especially from the army, were key advisers to Presidents Soeharto and Habibie and had considerable influence on policy. Under a dual function (‘dwi fungsi’) concept, the military asserted a continuing role in socio-political affairs. This concept was used to justify placement of officers in the civilian bureaucracy at all government levels and in regional and national legislatures. Today, although the military retains influence and is one of the only truly national institutions, the wide-ranging democratic reforms instituted since 1999 have abolished dwi fungsi and ended the armed forces' formal involvement in government administration. In addition, the police have been separated from the military, further reducing the military's direct role in governmental matters. Control of the military by the democratically elected government has been strengthened as a result. Therefore the demise of dwi fungsi has reduced army authority by withdrawing the armed forces from political life and subordinated it to civilian rule.23 This is surely a fundamental requirement of any modern democratic system.

**NATIONALISM & REGIONAL INDEPENDENCE ISSUES**

Indonesia rejoices in its nationalist past, as witnessed by the numerous days of commemoration in its calendar. So, after the end of Soeharto’s authoritarian regime in 1998, the emergence of nationalist tendencies amongst such a diverse ethnic population was perhaps an unavoidable

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20 US Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, op cit, p 5
21 *Idem*
22 Nusa B. Ikrar, *op cit*, p 195
inevitability. The country gradually faced more and more demands for independence in several provinces, where secessionists had been encouraged by East Timor’s 1999 success in breaking away after a traumatic 25 years of occupation by Indonesia. There, Indonesia was obliged to tolerate the intervention of an UN-sanctioned multinational force to restore order in the wake of orchestrated violence and destruction throughout the former Portuguese colony.  

The peace process in Aceh is widely seen as a major achievement of President Yudhoyono’s first administration. The Free Aceh Movement (GAM) gave up their weapons for decommissioning and the Government of Indonesia withdrew its forces thus meeting their obligations under the peace agreement leading to the first democratic elections in Aceh in December 2006. 

At the time of independence, the Netherlands insisted on maintaining its presence in the western half of New Guinea (formerly known as Irian Jaya but as Papua since 2000). A combination of Indonesian political and military pressure and international efforts led to Dutch transfer of sovereignty in October 1962 to a United Nations (UN) Temporary Executive Authority. In May 1963, full administrative control was handed over to Indonesia and Irian Jaya became a province of Indonesia following an UN-supervised Act of Free Choice in 1969 – although the legitimacy of this has is much debated. Subsequently, after consultations with the Papuan people, a Special Autonomy law for Papua was passed by the Indonesian government on 1 January 2002.

On 27 January 2003, President Megawati issued a Presidential Instruction to split Papua into three provinces and on 14 November 2003 the Indonesian government announced the formation of a new province of West Irian Jaya (now referred to as West Papua) in Papua marking the official split of West Papua from the rest of Papua. Despite some wrangling over the legality of this process, the government issued a regulation on 16 April 2008 which gives the province of West Papua equal status with that of the province of Papua.

Indonesia has also had to deal with ethnic tension causing large scale inter-communal violence between Christian and Muslim factions in Central Sulawesi and Maluku in 1999-2001. The origins of these conflicts are both complex and murky but seem to have started after Soeharto’s resignation as Indonesia’s President in 1998. Whether a result of disputes between Christian and Muslim local officials or disputes between Christian and Muslim youths, over 1,000 people have been killed in violence, riots, and ethnic cleansing that ripped through Central Sulawesi. Government forces were sent to the region in an attempt to stabilise the situation and, in December 2001, the parties involved met in government-sponsored peace talks. Both regions have now stabilised but the situation remains sensitive to the inherent distrust that can surface between these 2 groups.

If regional independence issues have been an ever-present part of Indonesia’s development, the fact that the nation has a single official language is seen a real unifying factor in a country where more than 300 distinct regional languages are still spoken. ‘Bahasa Indonesia’, the official language as stated in the Indonesian declaration of independence in 1945, is a normative form of the Malay language, which has been used in the archipelago for many centuries. Whilst ‘Indonesian’ is spoken as a first language by only a small proportion of Indonesia's large population (i.e., mainly those who live in and around Jakarta), over 200

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26 Reneging on a variety of sovereignty transfer agreements between the Netherlands and Indonesia.
27 FCO Country Report: Indonesia, op cit, p 3
million people regularly make use of the national language and this must serve to bolster nation’s identity against separatism.

GOVERNMENT, DE-CENTRALISATION & CORRUPTION

As the Yudhoyono presidency tackles national issues, Indonesia’s democratic transition continues. In the largest decentralisation ever tried, wide ranging powers to deliver the services on which people rely day-to-day – education, health services, infrastructure – have been transferred from central government to over four hundred district authorities. In effect, the Indonesian government has been re-arranged in 5 layers. National administration is at the top in Jakarta; provincial, district, sub-district and village levels complete the hierarchy. Over two million civil servants have accompanied these decentralisation powers and 40% of the budget for public services is now under local (district) government control – largely bypassing the provincial level (some say to “avoid giving too much power to units as large and therefore potentially dangerous as provinces”28). Success so far has been mixed; decentralisation is believed to be an additional causal factor in the proliferation of corruption and has led to the introduction of sharia bylaws in a number of some areas.

Future anti-corruption campaigns are vitally important, although the current administration has made more headway than previous ones by establishing the Corruption Eradication Commission (the Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK)29. Its duties include investigating and prosecuting corruption cases and monitoring the governance of the state. It has the authority to request meetings and reports in the course of its investigations. It can also authorise wire-taps, impose travel bans, request financial information about suspects, freeze financial transactions and request the assistance of other law enforcement agencies. Since it started operating in late 2003, the commission has investigated, prosecuted and achieved a 100% conviction rate in 86 cases of bribery and corrupt practices related to government procurements and budgets.

‘PANCASILA’ AND SHARIA-ISATION IN THE REGIONS

As has been stated, a fundamental aspect of Indonesian state ideology is pancasila. The 5 tenets of the philosophy are:

- Belief in the one and only God
- Just and Civilised Humanity
- The unity of Indonesia
- Democracy guided by consensus arising out of deliberations amongst representatives
- Social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia31

Whilst Pancasila was wholly sanctioned by Soekarno, President Soeharto’s regime went further, using considerable amounts of propaganda to ensure the importance of the ideology was understood by the people. More recently, it was reported in the Jakarta Post that President Yudhoyono said abandoning pancasila for narrow religious or ethnic-based ideologies will only jeopardise the unity and diversity of the nation.32 The implicit message to the country’s more extreme Muslim groups, which might be attempting to have sharia law imposed across

the country, is clear – it also has an obvious message for ethnic minorities pushing independence agendas.

However, a growing number of district administrations (i.e. below provincial government level) are adopting sharia bylaws which they believe are necessary to run and deal with local issues. Tackling gambling or alcohol with sharia laws should, they argue, help with crime fighting. Opponents suggest that such laws are symbolic and nothing to do with local law enforcement but are more to do with corruption, coercion and bribery. In his article in *South East Asia Research*, Michael Buehler contests that such laws are:

> “not just an indication of a conservative movement within the Indonesian Muslim community; nor …. simply …. symbolist politics. Rather, sharia bylaws indicate changing patterns of power accumulation and political corruption in Indonesian local politics …. allowing local elites to gain political currency by opening up new sources of revenue …. revenue generated by sharia laws which are then used to establish and nurture private networks of power brokers at the sub-district level.”

If *pancasila*’s first tenet is that “the State shall be based upon the belief in the One and Only God”, then Article 29 of the Indonesian Constitution goes on to say that “the State guarantees all persons the freedom of worship, each according to his/her own religion or belief.” Thus these 2 statements highlight the clear basis for monotheism and religious plurality to exist in Indonesia where non-Muslims make up the other 14% of the population. Indeed, despite evidence of growing conservatism and Islamic influence such as the 2008 Anti-Pornography Bill and the increasing number of sharia provincial bylaws, the fact is that overall support for Islamic political parties actually fell to their lowest level in the April 2009 General Election since the Soeharto years.

Even though some 86% of the electorate are Muslim, Islamic parties gained less than 30% of the 2009 vote – why? Surveys by the respected Indonesian Survey Institute suggest that the principle reason is that voters have waning confidence in Islamic parties’ ability to address pressing socio-economic issues and these are what matter to the man on the street. The same survey showed that economic and welfare issues far out-rank religion as priorities for voters. “Only 1% of respondents regarded ‘morality and religious’ issues as pressing but 75% ranked ‘the economy and people’s welfare’ as paramount problems for the government to tackle.”

**MILITANCY, TERRORISM AND JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH (JI)**

As democracy breathes its associated ‘freedoms’ into the population so militant Islamic groups in Indonesia have begun to flex their muscles. Indonesia’s primary terrorist threat has historically come from Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). This militant Islamist group, active in several Southeast Asian countries, seeks the creation of a single regional Islamic state through the amalgamation of Indonesia, Malaysia and the southern Philippines. After the 2002 Bali night club bombing, which killed 202 people, the US, which suspects JI of having ties to Al Qaeda

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35 US Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *op cit*, p 2
38 Indonesian Survey Institute, [http://www.lsi.or.id/](http://www.lsi.or.id/), Accessed 24 Feb 10
39 *idem*
(AQ), designated JI a foreign terrorist organisation. On 5 August 2003, JI carried out its next terrorist bombing killing 11 at the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta and 9 more were killed in a bomb blast outside the Australian Embassy, again in country’s capital. On 1 October 2005, a second Bali JI bombing killed 20 people and injured many more.

JI dates from the late 1970s and the group has its roots in Darul Islam, a violent radical movement that advocated the establishment of Islamic law in Indonesia. Darul Islam emerged after Dutch colonial rule in the late 1940s, and its followers continued to resist the postcolonial Indonesian republic, which it saw as too secular. Abu Bakar Bashir, an Indonesian of Yemeni descent, thought to be JI’s spiritual leader, joined Darul Islam in the 1970s and was imprisoned in Indonesia for Islamist activism. In 1985, after a court ordered him back to prison, Bashir fled to Malaysia. There, he recruited volunteers to fight in the anti-Soviet Muslim brigades in Afghanistan and sought funding from Saudi Arabia while maintaining connections with former colleagues in Indonesia.

After Soeharto stepped down in 1998, Bashir returned home to run a pesantren – an Islamic private school in Indonesia – in Solo, on the Muslim-majority island of Java. He also took up leadership of the Indonesian Mujahadeen Council, an Islamist umbrella group. Bashir has denied involvement in terrorism. Following the Oct 2002 Bali bombing, Indonesian officials demanded Bashir submit to questioning about that and earlier attacks. In 2003, he was convicted of treason, but the charge was overturned by the Jakarta High Court and, in April 2004, Bashir was released from prison. However, citing new evidence, Indonesian authorities re-arrested Bashir the same day.

"There is no nobler life than to die as a martyr for jihad. None. The highest deed in Islam is Jihad. If we commit to Jihad, we can neglect other deeds, even fasting and prayer".
Abu Bakar Bashir, Interviewed in Jakarta Prison, 2005

On 5 Mar 2005, Bashir was acquitted of charges that he participated in the attacks in Jakarta but was found guilty of conspiracy for the 2002 Bali bombings and sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison. Bashir’s jail term was cut as part of the tradition of remissions for Indonesia’s Independence Day, and he was released in June 2006.

More recently, on 17 July 2009, suicide bombers attacked two hotels in the heart of a Jakarta business district, killing nine and injuring more than 50. The police quickly established that this act of terrorism was the work of Noordin Mohammed Top, who led a breakaway group from JI. The attack set back Indonesia’s counter-terrorism efforts, but its political and economic impact was minor. In fact less than 1 week later, on 23 July, President Yudhoyono was declared the winner of the July elections by more than 60 per cent of the vote; nothing about the bombing appeared to weaken his government or prompt a crisis. As for Top, he killed himself after a 12-hour standoff with Indonesian police in a remote farm house in central Java on 17 September 2009.

While the extent of foreign involvement in these terrorist acts is still unclear, recruitment in Indonesia seems to be disturbingly easy. The salafi jihadi ideology that legitimises attacks on the U.S. and its allies, and Muslims who associate with them, remains confined to a tiny fringe, but that fringe includes disaffected factions of many different radical groups and

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42 See Oxford Islamic Studies Online at [http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0632](http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0632), Accessed 27 Apr 10
impressionable youths with no history of violence. What is clear is that Indonesia’s
democratic transition is being accompanied by a crisis of lawlessness that has allowed many
groups – including radical Muslim groups – to flaunt the law by engaging in violent behaviour
with seeming immunity.

Whilst terrorism is becoming a sad fact of life in Indonesia, observers believe that ‘no country
deserves more credit for improving its counterterrorism operations and capabilities than
Indonesia.’ Yes, the country has made the most of official links with Australian intelligence,
police and counter-terrorist authorities, at the same time Indonesia has made great efforts to
build a tough and successful counter-terrorist organisation, whilst still moving its democracy
forward.

**A TOLERANT ISLAMIC DEMOCRACY OR TROUBLE BREWING**

“We are so happy with the democratisation process in Indonesia, but there is a blackness in
this process,” said Eve Sundari, a legislator from the Indonesian Democratic Party. “Now the
door is open. Everybody can fight for their power to control people. Suddenly Islamic groups
want to impose to other Muslims their laws.”

Given its rich and diverse historical foundations, it could be suggested that there is no place on
earth better suited to be a Muslim democracy than Indonesia. With the world’s largest Muslim
population – far greater than the whole of the Middle East – Indonesia’s relaxed and varied
traditions are one reason that the vast majority of Indonesians remain committed to a tolerant
form of Islam.

The surprise that democracy complicates, rather than simplifies, the prospects for tolerance is
undoubtedly an issue for Indonesia’s democratic model. The challenge is of course that
pluralist democracy by definition (e.g., an independent judiciary, free press and individual
human rights), requires tolerance. Religious fundamentalism, on the other hand, requires
uniformity – the question is does Indonesia’s history offer a basis for compromise and
therefore success? It is clear from the country’s past that Islam was not forced upon Indonesia;
as stated earlier, Islam arrived with the traders in the 13th century and was gradually adopted by
some but sat alongside those with existing Hindu and Buddhist beliefs. Indeed, puppet theatre
was used by the first Islamic preachers to spread their religious message – more evidence of the
use of culture rather than force.

Tensions are clearly surfacing as Islam and democracy develops in Indonesia. It remains to be
seen whether the country’s traditional values of tolerance will survive the battle against the
more vociferous forms of Islam prevalent in parts of the world today, particularly as radical
Islamists return from exile, where the former military government had sent them. However,
as democracy implies majority rule, it follows that to some extent or other Indonesian
democracy may reflect Muslim majority rule but, as is clear from the election results, Indonesia
is not likely to become an Islamic state. The country has established a democratic regime that
is practicable in the circumstances rather one that pursues some ideological dream – the acid
test will be whether it lasts.

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45 op cit, pp 1-3
49 Calvin Sims, *op cit*, p 3
50 Soeharto limited religious expression in the name of nationalism.
FUTURE CHALLENGES

The July 2009 election results, which awarded Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (leader of the Democrat Party) 61% of the presidential vote, gave him clear direction from the Indonesian people to take forward his reform agenda, albeit that his desire to govern by consensus is based on a broad coalition of parties which seem to have little common political ground. More damaging, in the early days of his new term of office, was the scandal that surrounded calls for him to sack 2 senior cabinet members over the issue of bailing out a local failing bank – these 2 ministers, one the vice-president (Boediono), the other the finance minister – are key amongst his modernising reformers and, whilst still in the government, they look vulnerable. Observers believe that whilst there is no other obvious candidate to be their national leader, Indonesians are prepared to stick with President Yudhoyono because he brought the country through the global financial crisis.

ASEAN: INDONESIA’S ROLE

For all its weaknesses and limitations, Indonesia is nevertheless the most democratic, or, as critics might prefer (perhaps somewhat uncharitably, even jealously) the least undemocratic country in Southeast Asia. That achievement must amount to a comparative advantage when it comes to approaching the issues of how to deal with regional insecurity. As a founding member of ASEAN and host to its Secretariat, Indonesia has traditionally been seen as a lynchpin of the organisation. Indonesia promotes co-operation with ASEAN countries, particularly on trade and on regional issues such as piracy and smuggling. This co-operation was visibly strengthened following the 2004 Tsunami, when ASEAN countries were among the first to provide assistance to Indonesia.

What is perhaps more important is that Indonesia is the only ASEAN state in the G20. This allows Indonesia to adopt a unique role in ASEAN to lead on the way that the organisation helps take the region through the current global financial crisis. There is clearly an opportunity for Indonesia to endorse its place in the G20 “not just as a matter [reflection] of representation – an entitlement related to national size” – but as a key player in the global effort to tackle the recession as well as wider regional issues.

THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS

The global financial crisis has not affected Indonesia as much as some of her neighbours, mostly because of its reliance on vast domestic consumption as the driver of economic growth. Although the economy slowed significantly from the 6%-plus growth rate recorded in 2007 and 2008, to 4% in 2009, the economy is expected to grow by 5.5% in 2010 and 5.9% in 2011. Thus, Indonesia has outperformed its regional neighbours and joined China and India as the only G20 members that showed growth during the crisis.

The government has made extensive use of fiscal stimulus measures and monetary policies to counter the effects of the crisis and offered cash handouts to poor families. That said, Indonesia still struggles with poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, corruption, a...

51 Indonesian Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati resigned on 5 May 10 to become managing director of the World Bank, a day after she was questioned for a second time by investigators probing a 700-million-dollar bank bailout in 2008. See: http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific_business/view/10545251.html. Accessed 19 May 10.
52 Economist Intelligence Unit, ‘Country Report: Indonesia’, February 2010, p 12
53 The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was formed in August 1967 in Bangkok. The founding nations were Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei joined in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Lao PDR and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999 – the now 10 Member States of ASEAN.
55 ‘Indonesia’ Country Report, Economist Intelligence Unit, February 2010, pp 4-9
complex regulatory environment, and unequal resource distribution among regions.\textsuperscript{56} But President Yudhoyono’s re-election, with respected economist Boediono as his vice-president (notwithstanding the banking scandal already mentioned), suggests broad continuity of economic policy. Finally, the challenge of improving economic growth in 2010, while addressing pressing climate change issues (notably forests and peat-lands) that are the result of infrastructure improvements will be considerable.\textsuperscript{57}

**HUMAN RIGHTS AND POVERTY**

One of the major amendments made to the 1945 Constitution concerned human rights provisions. These were added in line with the larger part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This changed the fundamental thinking of 1945, when proposals to include human rights provisions in the Constitution had been specifically rejected. Soekarno believed that such individual rights detracted from the freedom of the sovereign state and that the individual was nothing more than an organic part of the state.

The various acts of repression carried out during the New Order under Soeharto, the mass killings of the 1960s, the long history of violence in Aceh, the destruction and killings in East Timor following the 1999 referendum, all hang over Indonesia in terms of overdue recompense. The Indonesian trials of those alleged to have been involved in the Timor turmoil, in which none of the military defendants have been convicted, has not satisfied campaigners for human rights, either within Indonesia or within the international community.

That said, Indonesia has made significant efforts to improve its relations with East Timor after the post-1999 violence and the relationship has been improved by Indonesian Presidential visits in 2002 and 2005, despite significant opposition from members of parliament. Following the last visit by President Yudhoyono, Indonesia and East Timor established a bilateral Commission of Truth and Friendship (CTF) “to conduct a shared inquiry with the aim of establishing the conclusive truth about reported human rights violations, and to make recommendations which can contribute to the healing of wounds of the past and lead to a peaceful and prosperous future for both nations”.\textsuperscript{58}

The CTF final report was issued in March 2008 and on 15 July 2008, President Yudhoyono and East Timor's President Horta, issued a joint statement saying that they "accept the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the Commission and recognise that gross violations of human rights occurred prior to and immediately after the popular consultation in East Timor in 1999".\textsuperscript{59} They also committed to the faithful implementation of the Commission's recommendations. Whilst most analysts have indicated that this report is a positive step forward for the two countries, others, like the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) believes that the report contains “too much friendship, too little truth”\textsuperscript{60}, given that no recommendations were made for prosecutions of named individuals in relation to the crimes identified, nor were any amnesties offered. Furthermore, President Yudhoyono refused to articulate the recommended apology for Indonesian actions in Timor-Leste in 1999.\textsuperscript{61}


\textsuperscript{57} Economist Intelligence Unit, \textit{op cit}, pp 13-17

\textsuperscript{58} War Crimes Studies Center, University of California, \url{http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~warcrime/Truth_commission.html}, Accessed 14 Apr 10.

\textsuperscript{59} Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia: \url{http://www.deplu.go.id/Pages/IIssueDisplay.aspx?IDP=4&I=en}, Accessed 17 Apr 10

\textsuperscript{60} ICTJ, \url{http://www.ictj.org/images/content/7/7/772.pdf}, Accessed 17 Apr 10

\textsuperscript{61} CTF Final Report says, “Commission recommends for official acknowledgment through expressions of regret and apology for the suffering caused by the violence in 1999...”, \url{http://www.etan.org/etanpdf/2008/final%20ctf%20eng210508.pdf}, Accessed 18 Apr 10, p xx
Poverty remains a major issue in Indonesia, though in recent years the official numbers show a declining trend. Increasingly, poverty is concentrated among rural households. The poorest people in rural areas tend to be farm labourers working on other people’s land, and smallholders farming very small areas of land. Data released by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) showed the poverty rate at 14.15 percent of the total population in March 2009, or 32.53 million people as a good harvest and stable rice prices lifted farmers' incomes. This was down from 15.42 percent in March 2008, equivalent to 34.96 million people. Although the Indonesian government declares it is having considerable success tackling poverty, there is a clear need for more to be done to deal with the issues that surround social deprivation. An article in the Jakarta Globe in March 2010 stated that “experts have warned that more effective social programs and better assessments of poverty were needed”, the article quotes one observer:

"The government should be able to create more effective programs to curb poverty in the country as we have not seen significant results. Poverty remains the biggest problem for the people, which limits them in many aspects."

To help Indonesia in its fight against poverty, the country gets a considerable amount of development assistance from Australia – this aid partnership is Australia’s largest and projected spending is over $500 million per year. The program supports a range of innovative approaches in the poorest districts, aimed at demonstrating new and more effective ways of delivering services and fighting poverty.

COUNTER-TERRORISM CHALLENGE AND SUCCESS

Indonesian security forces deserve considerable credit for developing an elite counterterrorism police force firmly in civilian hands, Densus-88 (Detachment-88). The force, created in 2003, is well-trained, well-paid, well-led and free of the endemic corruption that permeates much of Indonesia’s police force. However, the success that Indonesia’s counter-terrorist force has enjoyed so far must not divert the country from the challenge that remains. Islamic radicals, amongst others, are still a real threat. The emergence of home grown militants, radicalised on the internet, seeking training overseas is also worrying – a similar trend is occurring in Singapore, where there have been 5 arrests of home-grown militants. This is a new phenomenon that may require a new approach. Of additional concern are the ongoing conflicts in the southern Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan – all play a role in the radicalisation of Indonesians who travel to these areas and undoubtedly fuel the jihadist narrative, as well as provide safe havens and opportunities to train in small numbers. However, while terrorism will remain a fact of political life in the world’s largest Muslim country, because of its robust counter-terrorism strategy and determination to tackle this issue, its potential to jeopardise the state would seem to have decreased considerably, at least in the short term.

ISLAM: INDONESIA’S WIDER ROLE?

Given the fact that democratic Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, there are those who suggest that the country should step forward and take a leading global role in the

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63 Endang Turmudi, a sociologist from the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI),
Islam and democracy sit side-by-side in Indonesia. However, a recent conference at Wilton Park, England, on Indonesia’s global role, discussed this issue and a subsequent report published in the Jakarta Post newspaper shrewdly summarises why this is unlikely to happen:

“First, Indonesia, like many other countries, could not base its foreign policy on religious considerations. Despite the fact that Islam constitutes the religion of the majority of Indonesia’s population, its national identity is not exclusively defined in terms of Islam. More importantly, Indonesia itself is not a theocratic state.

Second, Indonesia has no intention to perpetuate the view that there is indeed ‘good Islam’ and ‘bad Islam’. For Indonesia, its democracy is unique in the sense that it is a democracy within which Islam is forced to play an important role, both in initiating the democratisation process and ensuring that Indonesia’s democracy remains ‘the only game in town’.”

What is clear is that the new United States administration, unlike previous ones, sees Indonesia as potential partner for Washington – not least as President Obama tries to improve relations with the Muslim world. In addition, Washington has not been slow to notice that Indonesia, as founder member of ASEAN, has been vociferous in its criticism of the Military Junta in Burma. Others see new opportunities for ‘US-Indo’ co-operation; the Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore (RSIS) believes that Indonesia and the US are on the verge of a period of much stronger relations – partly because of ‘green issues’. A recent article by the RSIS says:

“The world’s most powerful country and the world’s largest Muslim democracy are entering a ‘new age’ in ties. This will be marked by a major, if not tectonic, shift from Washington’s long-standing obsession with traditional security issues and human rights to new concerns – or what is increasingly being referred to as non-traditional security issues, ranging from climate change and energy to transnational crime and terrorism.”

CONCLUSION – DEMOCRACY: FIRM FOOTING BUT A WORK IN PROGRESS

A commonly held view in the West is that Islam and democracy are basically incompatible – not least influenced by the West’s seemingly unending ‘fight’ against Islamic radicals. Such pessimism does indeed have justifiable grounds, given the corruption of the electoral process in Afghanistan and Iran and the religious factionalism of Iraq. Even Pakistan and Bangladesh, at best, some might say, do little more than stumble between corruption and the next military coup.

On the other hand, advocates of Islamic pluralism point to Malaysia and Turkey. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state in which its democracy has been based on the dominance of 3 ethnic parties, only one of which has an Islamic identity. In Turkey, the military has historically insisted on its secularism, if occasionally at the expense of its democracy. But nothing even remotely resembling open electoral politics exists in other Islamic countries. As a result, the prevailing view in the West is that Islam and democracy are irreconcilable; that one cannot hold Islamic beliefs and also be a democrat – that is, until one considers Indonesia.

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68 Barack Obama spent part of his childhood in Indonesia.
If Indonesia's national motto, ‘Unity in Diversity’, is a guiding principle for its people to follow or not, judge the fact that about 117 million people, 77% of eligible voters, cast their vote in the first-ever direct presidential elections in September 2004 (the largest single-day election in the world). This is surely an unambiguous sign that Indonesians are united in their determination to decide their own future – through a democratic process of a majority of Islamic believers.

Indonesia is the world's third-largest democracy, the world's largest archipelagic state, and home to the world's largest Muslim population – 86% of its population of 240 million are Muslim. But it is Indonesia’s rich history of religious and cultural diversity that has bred a unique form, or rather forms, of Islam in this democracy. Islam has been overlaid and mixed with existing cultural and religious influences, which has shaped the predominant form of Islam in Indonesia. Furthermore, Indonesia's history of authoritarianism reflects the ideological origins of its tradition of strong leaders rather than its religious orientation.

A vitally important principle of Indonesia’s democracy is the enshrinement of the philosophy of *pancasila* in the country’s constitution, namely: monotheism, humanitarianism, national unity, representative democracy by consensus, and social justice. The fact that the constitution goes on to guarantee religious freedom to the 6 religions recognised by the state: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, fundamentally blocks the creation of a theocratic Islamic state. Indeed, the fact that President Yudhoyono has recently stated that discarding *pancasila* for narrow religious or ethnic-based ideologies will only jeopardise the unity and diversity of the nation. The message to the country’s hard-line Muslim groups and ethnic minorities is clear.

The military has been a significant political force throughout Indonesian history. What is clear today is that the role of the military in Indonesian governance has changed considerably since the country became a democracy in 1998 – an inevitable requirement of an open society. At the same time the emergence of nationalist tendencies amongst such a diverse ethnic population was perhaps an unavoidable inevitability. East Timor, Aceh, Papua, Central Sulawesi and Maluku, have all disputed Indonesian authority to varying degrees and for a variety of reasons – and now nearly all have some sort of independence or self-governance. The rise of nationalist tendencies is obviously another part of the establishment of a democratic process. Indonesia’s democratic transition also continues through massive decentralisation of central power to the local level – whilst providing a welcome devolution of authority, this has also lead to the rise of district administrations adopting sharia bylaws to increase power and influence but has also increased corruption.

As the 2009 election results show, Indonesians do not vote for Islamic parties just because they are Muslims. However, if the power of political Islam is diminishing the 4 main Islamic political parties will continue to be important players in Indonesian politics. Any government or opposition coalition needs to include a major Islamic party if it is to claim broad appeal – President Yudhoyono knows this and has 2 Islamic parties in his governing alliance. However, if building a new institutional framework after years of authoritarian government is one thing, dealing with the routine business of day-to-day governance, economic development, fighting corruption, cooling nationalist discontent, tackling poverty, respecting human rights and building the rule of law will be what decides whether Indonesia will make democracy work.

The fact that democracy complicates, rather than simplifies things, is a challenge for any democratic model, not least Indonesia’s. So, as democratic freedoms become established, Islamic radicalism is making its mark. The resulting rise in terrorism and acts of barbarism on the streets of Indonesia has become a reality of life in Indonesia. However, the country
deserves considerable credit for creating a tough and successful counter-terrorist organisation to deal with this terrorist threat, whilst still moving its democracy forward – that said, the terrorist challenge is enduring in today’s globalised and radicalised world.

As this paper hopefully shows, it is not Indonesia’s intention to take on the mantle of Islam as its sole identity. For all intents and purposes, it is a non-theocratic state, even if the majority of its people do adhere to Islamic principles. That does not qualify it to be the majority voice of Islam in the world (even having the largest Muslim populace). Rather, Indonesians would clearly like Indonesia to be recognised as a place where democracy and Islam can co-exist. If that is an attractive example to other Muslim countries, and it surely could be, then so be it – but Indonesia will not act as a precipitator of change elsewhere. Democracy in Indonesia is clearly different, it is one within which Islam plays a crucial role, not the other way round, but it is a democracy that is thriving and secure in this huge Islamic country.

A ‘good’ Islamic state could be defined as one that ensures Muslims are able to freely practice their faith. It does not follow, as this brief study of democracy in Indonesia shows, that this requires a theocratic state or that the law of the land should not have primacy. Indonesia’s pluralist liberal democracy provides a good home for the free practice of Islam – most Muslims accept and endorse this. Indeed, there clearly is no contradiction between Islam and a benign, egalitarian and accountable government; witness the fact that in 1955 Islamic parties gained 44% of the popular vote, 15% more than in the April 2009 elections – this, despite the fact that Islamic devotion is now much more pronounced today. Yes, the recent rise of international militant Islam, in Indonesia and elsewhere, is a growing concern but the fact that a small minority of Muslims have turned their faith into an aggressive sectarian ideology, means they are ignoring Islam's inherent humanitarian generosity.

Tensions are clearly surfacing as Islam develops in Indonesia; the question is whether the country’s traditional values of tolerance and understanding will survive the battle against the more vociferous forms of Islam so prevalent in parts of the world today. Whilst democracy dictates majority rule by default, this means that Indonesian democracy will reflect the wishes of the Muslim majority but Indonesia is not likely to be an Islamic state – Indonesians do not vote Islamic parties into power. Indonesia has therefore established a democratic system that is practicable in the circumstances rather one that pursues an ideological dream – the acid test will be whether it survives the test of time.
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