

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

**INFORMED QUESTIONS ON INDONESIAN POLITICAL MATTERS**

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5604  
GLOBAL ISSUES  
SEMINAR I

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| Report Documentation Page                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                    |                                     | Form Approved<br>OMB No. 0704-0188 |                                                     |                                 |
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| Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. |                                    |                                     |                                    |                                                     |                                 |
| 1. REPORT DATE<br><b>2002</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                    | 2. REPORT TYPE                      |                                    | 3. DATES COVERED<br><b>00-00-2002 to 00-00-2002</b> |                                 |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE<br><b>Informed Questions on Indonesian Political Matters</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                    |                                     |                                    | 5a. CONTRACT NUMBER                                 |                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |                                     |                                    | 5b. GRANT NUMBER                                    |                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |                                     |                                    | 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER                          |                                 |
| 6. AUTHOR(S)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                    |                                     |                                    | 5d. PROJECT NUMBER                                  |                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |                                     |                                    | 5e. TASK NUMBER                                     |                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |                                     |                                    | 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER                                |                                 |
| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)<br><b>National War College, 300 5th Avenue, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319-6000</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                    |                                     |                                    | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER            |                                 |
| 9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                    |                                     |                                    | 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)                    |                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |                                     |                                    | 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)              |                                 |
| 12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT<br><b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                    |                                     |                                    |                                                     |                                 |
| 13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES<br><b>The original document contains color images.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                    |                                     |                                    |                                                     |                                 |
| 14. ABSTRACT<br><b>see report</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                    |                                     |                                    |                                                     |                                 |
| 15. SUBJECT TERMS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                    |                                     |                                    |                                                     |                                 |
| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |                                     | 17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT         | 18. NUMBER OF PAGES<br><b>10</b>                    | 19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON |
| a. REPORT<br><b>unclassified</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | b. ABSTRACT<br><b>unclassified</b> | c. THIS PAGE<br><b>unclassified</b> |                                    |                                                     |                                 |

## **Informed Questions On Indonesia's Political Situation, Strategies and Policies**

Since the establishment of democratic rule in 1999, Indonesia has experienced a continuing series of domestic power struggles, ongoing separatist tensions and increasing fundamentalist Muslim unrest in widely separate regions of the populous archipelago nation. The combination of deep economic problems, increasingly violent secessionist strains and continuing political instability - leftovers of a legacy of forty years of authoritarian rule – have been dangerously compounded by the rapid growth of Islamic fundamentalism and the spread of the influence of Islamic-based terrorist groups such as Usama bin-Ladin's al-Qaeda organization. The deep-seated economic and socio-political problems facing Indonesia make continued stable, democratic rule an elusive goal for Indonesia's new leaders, who must on one hand placate growing radical constituencies, while still pursuing democratic reforms and strong economic growth necessary to fuel progress and stability. With the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia is experiencing a rapid increase in domestic public support for the more fundamentalist sects of Islam, some of which are vocally anti-American. As a result, Indonesian acceptance of 'anti-terrorist' assistance from the U.S. has become politically problematic for newly elected President Megawati Sukarnoputri. While the pro-western Megawati has on occasion faced-down anti-U.S. protestors in the streets, she remains politically dependent on, and vulnerable to, the Islamic parties in the Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat – MPR- (parliament) which sustain her rule. As an example of the continuing tradeoffs she must make while walking her political tightrope, President Megawati's initial strong condemnation of the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 had to be promptly and very publicly tempered to maintain support from her domestic Muslim audience. In subsequent comments targeted for domestic consumption voiced shortly after the initiation of

U.S. military action in Afghanistan, Ms. Megawati indirectly but strongly condemned the U.S. bombing of Muslims in Afghanistan- another public concession to her Muslim party coalition partners. Even her public backtracking on support for the U.S. was insufficient for some Indonesians. Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) leader Muhammad Rizieq warned that if President Megawati did not do more – to include severing diplomatic relations with the United States and its allies - the FPI would call on Muslims to “hunt foreigners and destroy foreign interests.”<sup>1[1]</sup>

This strategically important nation, located in a region of increasing importance to U.S. policymakers, will remain a political stability and security question mark, and have the potential to become a terrorist sanctuary unless and until the coalition’s ‘war on terrorism’ is successful in reducing the ranks of al-Qaeda members and its supporters in the region and Indonesia endorses the coalition’s efforts. In this regard, to reduce the growing threat of Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia, and in tandem with the anti-terrorist coalition’s aggressive efforts to root-out global terrorists in southeast Asia, pro-western leaders in the region, such as President Megawati, will be challenged to establish more positive and cooperative political relationships with moderate Islamic groups and leaders and work to steer Muslims away from terror and anti-western rhetoric and towards the more tolerant, democratic traditions of the faith. The informed questions posed below are intended to stimulate our Indonesian interlocutors to provide their insights and frank perspectives on the policies and possible future political, economic and strategic direction of their nation and of the important southeast Asian region.

## **I - General Topics:**

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<sup>1[1]</sup> Globalvision News Network” (<http://201.251.133.165/html/>)”U.S. Under Attack, Indonesia’s Military Ready for Unrest, But Not on ‘Full Alert.” (October 16, 2001)

To set the stage, and attempt to divine our Indonesian counterparts' perspectives on the potential dangers, threats and opportunities facing Indonesia in the foreseeable future, it would be best to lead-in with a broad, somewhat open-ended query on their views of the political direction of their nation, so we can better determine their perspectives on the range and seriousness of problems facing their country. **Purpose of the Question** – Will be to provide Indonesian officials an opportunity to explain their views and perspectives of the most important external and domestic threats facing Indonesia.

**Question:** *The global war on terrorism is having political and economic effects around the world – some of which affect Indonesia. Additionally, Indonesia's considerable foreign debt, rising energy costs, and the economic reforms called for by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a prerequisite for continued monetary assistance, will continue to create economic challenges for Indonesia for the foreseeable future. Against this backdrop, what are your greatest concerns about Indonesia over the next five years?*

## **II: U.S.-Indonesian Relations:**

The United State's relationship with this large and strategically-located nation will be determined through both nations' interactions, reactions and approaches to common threats and assessed opportunities. As defined by President Bush, our nation's most pressing threat is the danger posed by global terrorist groups and the nations comprising the 'axis of evil' (Iran, Iraq and North Korea.) Indonesia has not been spared the scourge of terrorism. There currently are cells of global-reach terrorist groups (including Usama Bin-Ladin's Al-Qaeda organization) operating within Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. U.S. policymakers have approached the Government of Indonesia with offers of antiterrorist cooperation and with information on specific individuals and groups suspected of planning

terrorist activities in Indonesia and the region<sup>2[2]</sup>. To date, Indonesians' reactions to U.S. offers have been cordial and accepting, but actions less concrete. To determine how best to plan, act or react to Indonesians' policies regarding global terrorism, we must first determine Indonesians' thoughts and perspectives on this issue and better understand the full set of domestic political dynamics which limit closer cooperation. **Purpose of the Questions** – Is to solicit our interlocutors' comments about the current level and direction of our coalition war against global terrorism and to better determine their stance related to anti-terrorist activities in the region and if/how they might better contribute to the coalition's global battle.

**Question Number One:** *What concerns do you have about U.S-Indonesian relations, especially as they relate to the current war on terrorism? Where do you think relations between our two nations are headed? How can they be improved?*

**Question Number Two:** *If Americans are prone to misunderstand Indonesia, what are the sources of that misunderstanding?*

### **III: Muslim Perceptions of U.S. Leadership and Activities:**

Recently completed polls<sup>3[3]</sup> suggest widespread negative opinions throughout the Muslim world for the United States, for U.S. President George Bush and for U.S. activities related to the current U.S.-led war on terrorism. These same polls indicate that most Muslims do not even believe Arabs carried out the September 11 attacks against the World Trade Center in New York and Pentagon in Washington D.C. area. Assuming the polls are correct, this perception would put the Muslim world at odds with U.S. actions and strategies designed to destroy global terrorism. **Purpose of the Questions:** To determine what, if any, divergence there may be between the government interlocutors with whom we speak and

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<sup>2[2]</sup> Personal Discussions with CIA analysts – Unclassified but unpublicized information. 01Mar.02

<sup>3[3]</sup> "Poll: Muslim world condemns U.S. war" "The Washington Times", 28Feb02, pp A12

the Indonesian 'man on the street' who (according to the poll, at least 74% of whom) believes Muslims were not to blame for the September 11 attacks.

**Question One:** *To what extent do you believe the recent polls, which seem to indicate widespread and growing distrust of the U.S. and its activities amongst Indonesians?*

**Question Two:** *What might the U.S. do to counteract this distrust?*

**Question Three:** *In your opinion, what are the root causes of this 'perception gap?'*

**Question Four:** *What responsibility –if any- do you believe the Indonesian government has to try to influence or counter public opinion on this issue?*

#### **IV: Terrorism In Indonesia:**

Recent newspaper reports link a central Java-based cleric, Abu Bakar Bashir, head of the Indonesian Mujahideen Council –and possible leader of the terrorist-affiliated group Jermaah Islamiah- to terrorist plans to attack U.S., British and Australian interests in Singapore. Mr. Bakar explained the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington as a Jewish conspiracy, hatched with the aid of former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger<sup>4[4]</sup>. In late January 2002, Indonesian police reportedly questioned Mr. Bakar, but he was released without charge. As Jermaah Islamiah has probable (but as yet unproven) links to the al-Qaeda terrorist organization, any information Mr. Bakar could provide about Southeast Asian terrorist cells would be extremely useful in our coalition's war on terrorism<sup>5[5]</sup>. **Purpose of the question:** To determine the extent to which Indonesian authorities have shared –or are willing to share- information on various terrorist groups operating in the region and their sense for the dangers posed by these same groups.

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<sup>4[4]</sup> "Unlikely Advocate of Evil" "Nationwide News Party Limited, "The Australian", pp. 01. 05 February, 2002,

<sup>5[5]</sup> A Nation Challenged: Asian Arena; "Finding a Tepid Ally in the War on Terror, U.S. Presses Indonesia to Arrest 2 Clerics." "The New York Times." 18Feb02, pp A8.

**Question:** *In January 2002, Indonesian authorities questioned cleric Abu Bakar Bashir, head of the Mujahideen Council regarding possible terrorist threats against U.S. and U.K. interests. There are additional reports of Indonesian-based terrorist organizations gaining strength in ability and numbers. What anti-terrorist legislation exists in Indonesia to keep these groups from gaining additional influence and becoming greater dangers to Indonesian security and national stability?*

**V: Regional Relations:**

As the fourth-most populous – and largest Muslim – nation in the world, Indonesia matters globally. A stable, democratic and peaceful Indonesia, trading and cooperating openly on the world stage will be a political anchor in this strategically important region. Conversely, the failure of Indonesia, either economically or politically, would create a regional power vacuum and net outflows of instability in one of the most critical regions on the globe. With some 60 percent of the world's trade transporting the straits of Malacca, an Indonesian government with hostile intent toward the United States would pose a threat to our nation's well-being and security. As a result, it is in our strategic interest to ensure a stable, open and peaceful Indonesia, democratic in values and well-grounded in relations with other democratic nation in the region. **Purpose of the Questions:** To better determine our interlocutors' perspectives on the priorities and challenges facing them regionally in the near-term. Also important will be their attitudes toward the international bodies engaged in the region, both as economic engines and as potential security guarantors. Expect their answers to include concerns about immigration policies in Australia, terrorist activities in Philippines, Chinese intentions in the South China Sea and international claims on the Spratly Island chain. In discussing the

international bodies (ASEAN, ARF and APEC), it will be most revealing to learn how the Indonesians view China's role and intentions in –or around- these bodies – and in the region.

**Question Number One:** *What are your greatest concerns about the region over the next five to ten years? What threats to Indonesia do you see?*

**Question Number Two:** *What role do you see Indonesia playing in ASEAN? And in ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)? In the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)?*

**Question Number Three:** *What role do you see China playing the region in the next five to ten years?*

**Question Four:** *If Indonesia views Chinese expansion or influence in the region as a threat or coercive presence, what plans have been made (or might be considered), either unilaterally or with other nations, to counteract China's influence?*

#### **VI: Indonesian-Australian Relations:**

Relations between these two southeast Asian nations has undergone considerable strain recently, underscored by Australia's early support for the ultimate independence of the former Indonesian territory of East Timor. Adding insult to injury, Australians also led the U.N. peacekeeping force on East Timor since its inception in 1999. This irritation recently (early-February 2002) manifested itself during the visit of Australian Prime Minister John Howard to Jakarta, when he was snubbed by speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) and House of Representatives (DPR) speaker, Mr. Akbar, who cancelled plans to meet with the Australian PM. Ignoring recommendations by the Indonesian parliamentary foreign affairs commission to shun the Australian during his visit, Prime Minister Megawati went ahead with her planned summit with the Australian leader. They discussed both

counter terrorism measures as well as the sensitive topic of people-smuggling<sup>6[6]</sup>. **Purpose of the question:** To determine the depth and scope of Indonesian animosity toward Australians and better gauge the two nations' ability to face regional strategic issues and challenges, such as continued immigration problems and the growing influence of China in the region.

***Question: To what extent do Indonesian officials see their nation's future linked in either security matters or regional policies with Australia? What, if any, provisions are being made to form joint strategies or consultations with Australians or other nations in the region? On what issues?***

#### **VII: Military Challenges:**

Indonesia's military establishment, a long-time major player in the domestic political scene, has been under intense pressure to end its political role. Although the Military now has a reduced presence in the House of People's Representatives, it retains a powerful influence over the government and still holds four important posts in Ms. Megawati's cabinet. Criminal human rights abuses by Indonesian army officials during the East Timorese independence struggles led to U.N.-sponsored human rights tribunals against Indonesian military officers. Military-to-military contacts between U.S. and Indonesian counterparts were frozen because of the Indonesian army's human rights abuses related to the East Timor Independence battles. **Purpose of the Questions:** To gauge the value Indonesian military and political figures place on renewing closer military contacts and cooperation with U.S. forces. To determine the Indonesian Government's assessment of the most important global and regional threats facing their nation and to evaluate the degree to which

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<sup>6[6]</sup> Political Scene: "A state visit causes controversy" Economist Intelligence Unit's Indonesian Country Report; 13 February, 2002

Indonesian military officers value the connections to, and training received from, the U.S. military.

**Question One: *What do you foresee to be the military's greatest challenges over the next five to ten years?***

**Question Two: *How have the mission and priorities of the Indonesian military changed over the past four years?***

**Question Three: *What do you think are the greatest similarities/differences between the armed forces of the U.S. and Indonesia?***

**Question Four: *How important to Indonesia is reestablishing closer military-to-military relations with the U.S.?***

**Question Five: *How will the next generation of Indonesian military officers differ from the current corps of commanders?***

**Question Six: *How will the Indonesian military's various service schools and academies (i.e. Armed Forces Academy - Akabri; Command and Staff College – Sesko TNI; and the National Resilience Institute – Lemhannas) likely adjust to these challenges?***