

“U.S. – Indonesian Relations on the Move: President Obama’s Upcoming Trip to Indonesia and the planned United States – Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership”

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On February 17, 2010, **Kurt Campbell**, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs delivered the inaugural address for the USINDO Policy Briefing Series, which invites distinguished speakers and high-level government officials to discuss a variety of topics covering U.S. foreign policy towards Indonesia and the U.S. – Indonesian relationship. Dr. Campbell discussed the evolving foreign policy towards Indonesia and Southeast Asia, and the role of the comprehensive bilateral partnership in achieving U.S. and Indonesian foreign policy goals. President Obama’s first trip to Indonesia takes place under a larger global and domestic context that has important ramifications for the visit. First, the Obama Administration is undergoing a strategic reevaluation of policy priorities for the next three years. Second, China looms large within the U.S. foreign policy context, even as it relates to Indonesia; the United States faces profound strategic competition from China in the region. There are also strong expectations on both sides about what can be accomplished through ASEAN, and the need to take stronger steps on Burma. The role of Islam is also an important context. Previously, the Middle East Peace Process was on

the backburner for U.S. – Indonesian relations, but has since moved to the top of the agenda and will likely be discussed during President Obama’s visit. Finally, the State Department faces an institutional challenge in how to deal with the rising state such as Indonesia. Thus, now is the time for the United States to develop specific policy actions and develop an overall strategy towards strengthening the relationship with Indonesia.

One of the most important contributions the Obama administration can make during the trip is to raise the profile of U.S. – Indonesian relations. U.S. – Indonesian relations are at a critical juncture, and President Obama’s planned trip to Indonesia allows the United States to move beyond generalities and take U.S. – Indonesian relations to a higher level. Indonesia tops the list of countries that are important to the U.S. but that Americans do not fully understand or appreciate. One of the main goals of the bilateral partnership is to change this (lack of) perception.

With a relatively new administration in the U.S., and the start of the second term for Indonesian President Yudhoyono, it has been difficult for both sides to gain momentum on several issues important to the bilateral relationship, such as

trade, investment, and even the return of the Peace Corps to Indonesia. However, there are several specific themes that the U.S. wants to work on with Indonesia over the next several years that will likely be incorporated into the bilateral partnership. First, the Administration wants to do more on higher education with Indonesia. Second, the Administration is working to figure out the best way to manage trade, investment and economic issues related to U.S. – Indonesian relations. Third, the U.S. would like to increase cooperation on environmental issues. The U.S. would like to work with Indonesia to establish a climate center in Jakarta, and is also working with the development banks and international financial institutions at what kind of specific investments can be made in the Indonesian forestry and peatland sectors. Indonesia has several unique qualities and characteristics, and despite difficulties, the country is far better positioned than anyone would have anticipated two decades ago. The challenge, then, is to avoid overpromising and under-delivering. The expectations being raised in both the United States and Indonesia about what can be accomplished during President Obama's visit are high, but both sides need to recognize that the trip is just the beginning of a process that will take place over many years. The State Department is actively soliciting ideas and suggestions for how to strengthen and improve Indonesian relations through the partnership and beyond.

Q: The partnership is being advertised as a joint effort; will there be some deliverables for Indonesia as well?

A: Indonesia has a few ideas for working with the U.S., especially on areas such as military cooperation and higher education. Military cooperation is difficult for the U.S., but efforts have been made to convince universities to establish centers in Indonesia, and there are opportunities to partner on strengthening educational exchanges. The U.S. has been clear that the partnership is not just about giving Indonesia aid, but it will take some time and effort.

Q: Will President Obama raise human rights and freedom of expression issues?

A: President Obama is aware of issues related to human rights, especially women's rights in Aceh. While acknowledging progress, he does realize these are areas for concern. One of the biggest challenges is not only addressing the current issues, but also how to deal with past abuses. The U.S. and Indonesia must acknowledge the past but not dwell on areas where substantial progress has been made.

Q: Will President Obama consider asking what Indonesia can do to facilitate the Middle East Peace Process?

A: There is a general timidity among Indonesians on issues related to the Middle East Peace Process. Although they are comfortable commenting on the situation, they are not comfortable being drawn into it. The U.S. is trying to work on this.

Q: Will President Obama be visiting the ASEAN Secretariat?

A: The U.S. is about to send its first ambassador to ASEAN, and the President recognizes that ASEAN issues are critical to regional relations. However, there are a lot of ideas for the short trip to Indonesia, and the itinerary is still being finalized.

partnerships into President Obama's statements.

Q: American public diplomacy education in Indonesia is severely lacking; there are very few "American Centers" at Indonesian universities, for example. Are there any plans to fund programs such as these?

A: There will likely be a modest increase in public diplomacy, but over the course of many years. However, the most important element of a growing, vibrant, and multidimensional business and commercial relationship with Indonesia is understanding of the United States. Thus, unless there can be a substantial increase in the size of the American business community in Indonesia, it will be difficult for the bilateral relationship to fully achieve its potential. to take off. Hope to see modest increase in public diplomacy, but is years-long process.

Q: Public-Private Partnerships can be a useful tool, especially when the U.S. and Indonesian governments are faced with finite resources – are there any plans to increase public-private partnerships?

A: Unfortunately, the U.S. Government not configured well for Public-Private Partnerships. Thus, developing such programs remains an enormous challenge. However the State Department is working to insert language related to public-private