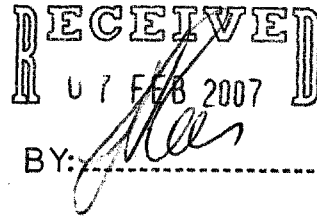




The University of Sydney



School of Languages and
Cultures

Submission 9
TT 6 December 2006

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30 January 2007

Submission to the inquiry on the *Agreement between Australia and the Republic of Indonesia on the Framework for Security Cooperation*.

Dear Dr Southcott

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *Agreement between Australia and the Republic of Indonesia on the Framework for Security Cooperation*. My comments are made in a personal capacity, and are not representative of the views of the University of Sydney. I comment as someone who has travelled to and researched on Indonesia for thirty-five years. Indonesia is probably the most important country in the region for Australia, both in terms of its size, strategic position and its vast, largely unrealised potential as the fourth-largest country and third-largest democracy in the world. In the last four decades I have seen many fluctuations in the relationship between our country and Indonesia, but consider that the current period is a low point in the relationship. The Australian public views Indonesia in a very negative light, and Indonesians view Australia in a more negative light than has been the case previously.

There are a number of key reasons for the poor state of the relationship. Some of these can be ascribed to the fact that Indonesia is viewed by Australians chiefly in the context of the "Global War on Terror". This lens has been applied by the Australian media, which since the fall of Suharto presents Indonesia as a place of "danger". While there is no denying the activities of a small circle of terrorists in Indonesia, this is a group who would make up no more than .000001% of the population. Levels of public safety and the danger of violent crime in Indonesia are much better than in countries such as South Africa, or even in many parts of Australia.

Broadly speaking, sections of the media focus on negative portrayals of Islam and presents Indonesia as a source of jihad directly threatening Australia. Positive aspects of Indonesia are downplayed or ignored, and the country is not treated in the comprehensive manner that the UK or the USA (both also sites of major terrorist acts), or even China and India, for example, are portrayed. While Australian politicians have shown a nuanced understanding of the relationship, rather than attempting to counter this negative focus on terror, they have not done a lot to counter the negative images in the media images. The Australian government's level of travel warning on Indonesia also unfairly exaggerates the danger, and should be at no greater level than the warnings for India or South Africa.

In this context, I consider that the *Agreement* continues the focus on terror, and thus makes no positive contribution to changing the framework of the relationship. I have no particular criticism of

the content of the *Agreement*, since it largely restates or supports activities and agreed views that are already in place. I do not consider, however, that the supporting material accurately explains the context of the role of the Indonesian military and the context of jihadist activities in Indonesia. A recent book by Professor John T. Sidel of the London School of Economics and Political Science, *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia* (Cornell University Press, 2006), summarises the state of our knowledge of religious violence. He advances the argument that we need to view jihadist activities in Indonesia as belonging to a particular narrow period (2000-2004), and as the product of distinct political and social developments in that country, not simply as some kind of 'franchise' of other bodies. He argues convincingly that the jihadist activities were the result of a reversal of political fortunes amongst advocates of Islam after 1999, rather than a rise of Islamicism in mainstream Indonesian politics. He also points out that violent terrorist activities were usually undertaken with either direct support from members of the Indonesian military, or at least by elements of the military turning a blind eye when they had foreknowledge of bombings. Such support came from different motives, ranging from sympathy with the terrorists, to attempts to undermine the country's political leadership, to internal factional disputes and rivalry with the Police. An agreement that includes active collaboration with the Indonesian military in order to combat terrorism should thus be seen at best as naïve. Recent rumours of a council of generals preparing to stage a coup indicate that the military still remains the biggest threat to Indonesia's fragile democracy.

In summary, I do not see this agreement as achieving much for improved Australian-Indonesian relations. The resources involved would be utilised much better in cultural and social programs that improve both direct relations and perceptions between the two countries, in particular into countering negative images of Indonesia in the Australian media, and negative images of Australia in the Indonesia media. Only through better social and cultural relations on a people-to-people level can we achieve solid and lasting security.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Vickers', written in a cursive style.

(Professor) Adrian Vickers