

**Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties  
concerning the Agreement between Australia and the Republic of  
Indonesia on the Framework for Security Cooperation**

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**The Lombok Agreement and the national interest**

The quick enactment of the Lombok Agreement is certainly both in the national interest of Australia and Indonesia and may act as a new more public means to focus the bilateral relationship on our permanent shared interests.

The wide coverage of this treaty indicates how our shared interests have grown and diversified in the last decade, especially in non-state-based “new security threats.” The coverage of transnational crimes listed in Point 7 of the Law Enforcement section exemplifies this.

The relatively quick negotiation of this unique treaty (for both sides) and the fact that the negotiations survived the diplomatic dispute over the 43 Papuan arrivals shows the two governments’ commitment to deepening the bilateral relationship.

**Problems in the bilateral relationship**

As with the 1995 agreement, the Lombok Agreement is likely to be more at the mercy of the most serious problem in the bilateral relationship than it will be able to moderate it.

This problem is the vulnerability of the relationship to policy difference and conflict between the two states and the negative popular and political reactions these cause on both sides of the Arafura Sea. On the Australian side, the inability of the relationship to remain on an even keel during these inevitable points of disagreement is partially explained by the airplay critics of the Indonesian state and of the bilateral relationship in general gain during these incidents. On the Indonesian side, there is also a small but growing number of “Australia” critics playing a similar role in the Indonesian media, the security forces and even in parliament.

These critics and the coverage they garner in both countries can quite quickly turn a diplomatic dispute or policy disagreement into a public issue increasing the pressure for political responses focussed on domestic political expedience rather than support for long-term national interests in a smooth and cooperative bilateral relationship. This “snowballing” phenomenon was apparent during the emotive Schapelle Corby trial and the diplomatic crisis over the 43 Papuan arrivals.

A general lack of understanding about and wariness towards the other country among large parts of the two populations underpin this vulnerability. The Lowy Institute Poll of 2005 clearly shows this lack of general knowledge and the prevalence of outdated views. This is particularly worrying as the rapid and, so far, smooth consolidation of democracy in

Indonesia should remove one of the greatest sources of difference between the two states and criticism of the Indonesian state within Australia. Yet, the Australian public seems largely unaware of how far democracy has advanced in Indonesia.

The Lombok Agreement will do little to address this deep-seated bilateral problem that undermines the national interest of both countries.

### **Principle Three**

While the Lombok Agreement did not garner too much press coverage in either country, the coverage it received focussed primarily on Principle 3 and critics' concerns that this might lead to the infringement of the right of free speech in Australia. This is an example of the problem mentioned above especially as the Agreement itself clearly rules this out as noted in the National Interest Assessment.

While it is foreseeable that Indonesian authorities may interpret this principle to pressure Australia over future diplomatic tensions over Papua, likewise, Australia may interpret this principle to encourage Indonesia to take firmer action against locally-based terrorist groups that threaten Australia.

### **Future action**

The Lombok Agreement is a welcome addition to the bilateral relationship and offers a framework for future cooperation across a large number of fields. To enhance the effectiveness of the Agreement and to help combat the problem mentioned above, both governments should consider quick cooperative action in some of the areas covered by the agreement. These could include illegal fishing and the maintenance of shared marine resources, technical assistance in civil aviation and closer cooperation on the transit of illegal drugs.

Such cooperative action should be made public and referred to as part of developing the agreed upon framework. Publicly recognised cooperation under this new framework may help focus public opinion on the depth of the two countries' shared interests and reduce the lack of understanding and wariness.