

PART  
III

## Indonesia: An Example for Islam?

*“If you want to know whether Islam, democracy, modernity,  
and women’s rights can co-exist, go to Indonesia.”*

HILLARY CLINTON

**I**N SOME RESPECTS Indonesia might seem an ideal target for the expansion of Al-Qaeda-backed or directed terrorism. Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, with porous borders and large regions of poverty. Indeed, the hand of Jemaah Islamiyah, a militant Islamic group active in several Southeast Asian countries that seeks to establish a pan-Islamic state across the region, and a more extreme splinter group, is evident in several terrorist attacks that have taken place in Indonesia. These include the bombing of a night club on Bali which killed more than 200 people, a suicide car bombing outside the Australian

embassy, and an assault on J.W. Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels in Jakarta.

But deplorable though these actions were, they are not of the scale or frequency of terrorist attacks that have taken place in lands elsewhere. The reasons for this are several.

Indonesia's brand of Islam is more moderate than that practiced in other Muslim states where Islamic extremists have been able to breed and recruit. Though some militant groups have attempted to impose the concept of *sharia* law, as practiced in other Muslim nations, they have gained little traction in Indonesia. There is no official mosque or spiritual leader. Yudhoyono's government presides over a mix of predominantly secular and Islamic minority groups that are fully protected. Particularly meaningful is the protection of a significant Chinese minority active, as in other Southeast Asian countries, in trade and commerce. During the purge following the *Gestapu* coup attempt, the Chinese were often singled out as targets. The tolerance and moderation of Indonesia's Muslim faith today has proved fallow ground for Islamist jihad.

After years of violence and autocratic rule, Indonesia revels in its newfound democracy. Voting is free and fair; President Yudhoyono, having been first elected in 2004, was reelected to another term in 2009. Hard-line Islamic parties were able to campaign and did so, but none provided any serious competition. As Joshua Kurlantzick, a Southeast Asia Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote: "Though Indonesian leaders themselves are hesitant to lecture other countries, their model could offer les-

sons for nations from Pakistan to Morocco. [Indonesia] has managed to create a stable political system using its military to guarantee secular rule, as does Turkey. The militant Islamic groups that might have emerged to threaten the country's future have been crushed and co-opted. Indonesia has adopted modern techniques that appear to be working. In its success, Indonesia also offers the United States ways to help build stable societies in the Arab-Muslim world. It is a model for cooperation and moderation.”<sup>1</sup>

Then there are the lessons of history. Although the Indonesian students of the Sukarno era, and the bloody purge that followed it, are today ageing and silver haired, the horror of those events is as fresh as yesterday, a searing memory on the nation's psyche. There is a “never again” mechanism that kicks in and rejects any concept of more mass violence.

Tackling the problems of backwardness and poverty, so often the breeding ground for terrorism in the Arab world, the Indonesian government has embarked on a massive anti-poverty campaign, funneling cash and benefits to the poor. One of the reasons enabling the now-discredited Communist Party in Indonesia to recruit so heavily in the 1960s was its distribution of seed and rice to peasant farmers at huge discounts from prices demanded by banks and lenders.

The government has also tamped down secessionist leanings in outer regions of the Indonesian archipelago by a policy of decentralization, giving them more local autonomy and control over local finances.

Another tool in the government's panoply for stability is a large standing army. While the army's political influence has been toned down, it remains a force at the government's hand should need arise to quell any unwelcome threat to Indonesia's peaceful progress from without or within. The army has not been assigned to hunt Islamic terrorists, the police force having proved extremely successful in this effort.

From the outset of his tenure, President Yudhoyono made the defeat of terrorism an important priority of his administration. In public speeches he made clear to his people that the terrorists were a threat to Indonesians, as well as to Westerners, and that they must be liquidated and Indonesian youth protected from recruitment. He urged the "whole of the Indonesian people" to rise up against terrorists and promoted an organization, "Terror Free Tomorrow," an overwhelming majority of which declared that terrorism was unjustified under any circumstances. The president of one of Indonesia's largest Muslim organizations, Kiai Haj Hasyim Muzadi, declared: "Terrorism has nothing to do with Islam."

While some were killed in firefights, the authorities have captured more than 300 terrorists, trying them in the courts, which sentenced them to jail or execution. But the government has also launched a remarkable "deradicalisation" program, using former militants to "turn" convicted terrorists in prison, using religion and "soft persuasion" to win them over. Some of the redeemed militants have appeared on television, chronicling, and apologizing for, their

violent pasts. Some have cooperated with the police to help find would-be terrorists still at large.

The police, especially an “88” counterterrorism unit, have developed skills in intelligence and tracking that have hobbled nascent terrorist plans. In 2009 the 88 unit trapped and killed Noordin Mohammed Top, one of the most wanted terrorist leaders in Indonesia, if not Southeast Asia. Noordin had broken away from Jemaah Islamiyah to form a splinter group loyal to Al Qaeda, marginalizing him and making him even more repugnant to Indonesians as a violent extremist of the radical fringe. He had evaded capture on a number of occasions. While the mainstream Jemaah Islamiyah had backed away from supporting violence, Top had not. Sidney Jones, an expert on Indonesian terrorism with the International Crisis Group, said Top was the only leading militant leader in Indonesia still campaigning for implementation of Osama bin Laden’s 1998 fatwa on killing Westerners.<sup>2</sup> The Malaysian-born Top had built up something of a cult among some younger militants, contemptuous of many senior members of Jemaah Islamiyah, dismissing them as NATO—“No Action, Talk Only.” Top’s death was seen as a major blow for extremist organizations in Indonesia.

One more positive factor in their campaign is that the Indonesians have tackled their terrorism problem without a large American footprint in place. There has been quiet American help in some areas of training with the 88 unit, but there has been no requirement, or wish for, American troops on the ground.

The American role in Indonesia's affairs has not been trumpeted. This serves both countries well. Some conspiracy theorists have sought to depict the hand of the CIA in Indonesia, as far back as the days of *Gestapu*. As an eye-witness to those events, I am confident that the United States had no such role. Indonesians themselves purged their country of Communism. Indonesian nationalism was, and is, resilient and durable. Even if it had been eager to intervene in that era, the United States was unable. Then, as since, U.S. diplomacy toward Indonesia has proved one of the most successful chapters in the contemporary history of American foreign policy in Asia.

When then secretary of state Madeleine Albright visited Indonesia in 1999, she praised Indonesia as a cofounder of the nonaligned movement and a driving force behind the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. She lauded Indonesia as a model of tolerance, of "unity in diversity," as proclaimed in the nation's national motto, "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika."

When Hillary Clinton, secretary of state in the Obama administration, visited Indonesia in 2009, she praised Indonesia's "key role in commitment to 'smart power' in international diplomacy." She pledged her administration's intention to "listen, and support the country that has demonstrated so clearly that Islam, democracy, and modernity can not only coexist but thrive together."

Indonesians have met their challenges by themselves. The United States has understood, offering cooperation and assistance when welcome and appropriate.

President Yudhoyono has had six different educational experiences in the U.S., five of them military and one civilian.

But like Indonesian presidents before him, he has kept his relationship with the United States discreet. Ever since Suharto dragged his country back from a leftist embrace under Sukarno, Indonesian leaders have wanted to preserve a posture of public nonalignment, eschewing any suggestion that they have become puppets of the United States. It is a posture which successive U.S. administrations have wisely respected.

When Indonesia was hit by a giant tsunami crashing across its shores, the United States sent the aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln* to help in relief efforts. Fifteen thousand U.S. servicemen took part in an airlift by helicopters from ship to shore, delivering tons of food, water, and other aid to the victims. The U.S. effort was appreciated by the Indonesian government and citizens. Subsequent polls in Indonesia showed a sharp increase in the popularity of America. But at a point in the operation, the Indonesian government politely indicated it was time for American troops to leave Indonesian soil. Without question, the American servicemen were withdrawn. Mission accomplished. Diplomacy positive.

This is the kind of humanitarian American involvement which affords Al Qaeda and its offshoots little opportunity for anti-American propaganda or incitement.

I believe that Indonesia, the largest Muslim, but non-Arab, country in the world, and other non-Arab countries with substantial Muslim populations could play a much more significant role in engaging with Muslim nations that are Arab.

Lee Kuan Yew, former prime minister of neighboring Singapore and considered one of Asia's wise elder states-

men, cites Indonesia as an essential participant in the war against terrorism: “When moderate Muslim governments such as those in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Persian Gulf states, Egypt and Jordan, feel comfortable associating themselves openly with a multilateral coalition against Islamic terrorism, the tide of battle will turn against the extremists.”<sup>3</sup>

Hassan Wirajuda, Indonesia’s foreign minister from 2001 to 2009, signaled his nation’s desire to take a larger role in solving problems of the Islamic world. Countries in the Middle East, he argued, have been so deeply involved in their problems for so long that they can get too focused on specific aspects. The holder of graduate degrees in law and diplomacy from Harvard, the Fletcher School, and Oxford, Wirajuda said: “We who follow events in the Middle East from a distance can see a larger, clearer picture. Hence we are able to produce fresh ideas that might be helpful in the quest for a solution.”<sup>4</sup>

With its approach to internal political problems, Indonesia typically adopts the practice of *mushiwara*, the art of bringing everybody together to make decisions by consensus, rather than determining winners and losers. Wirajuda believed that Indonesia could usefully use this technique, for example, to attempt reconciliation between the Palestinian factions of Hamas and Fatah.

President Yudhoyono, while carefully avoiding any move that could mark him a tool of the United States, believes Indonesia’s melding of democracy, Islam, and modernity befits his nation for a constructive role in reducing terror-

ism, “a crime that is neither a holy war nor a struggle for justice.”

He believes several things have to happen.

First, he believes world leaders must strengthen the various dialogues already taking place, such as the UN Dialogue Among Civilizations, the Saudi initiative of an Interfaith Conference, and the Global Inter-Media Dialogue (launched by Indonesia after the crisis following cartoon depictions of the Prophet Muhammad).

Second, these efforts must reach deeper to the grassroots. “Even in the most modern societies, ignorance about other religions is commonplace. In some Western countries, Islam is the fastest-growing religion—and this is accompanied by rising Islamophobia. A recent Gallup poll indicated that the proportion of Muslims who understand and appreciate the West is much higher than the number of Westerners who appreciate Islam . . . this is a two-way street. Leaders in the Muslim world must reach out to the West, just as much as they expect the West to understand Islam.”

Third, the forces of moderation must be bolstered worldwide. “Tolerance and moderation should be taught to children in schools from a very early age. In Indonesia, Muslim students in school exams are asked questions about the Christian celebration of Christmas, and the Hindu tradition of Nyepi (a day of silence in Bali).”

Fourth, “we will also need to ensure that the world’s civilizations can all benefit from globalization. Humanity has never seen a time when all civilizations prosper together. The remedy is education, which will put marginalized socie-

ties on an equal footing with the West in deriving the benefits of civilization.”<sup>5</sup>

In lauding Hillary Clinton’s decision to visit Indonesia on her first visit to Asia as secretary of state, the *Atlantic’s* Robert D. Kaplan wrote: “Indonesia is crucial for many more reasons than the fact that President Obama went to school there for a few years as a child. It is the largest Muslim country in the world and the fourth most populous. It commands the narrow Strait of Malacca, which is the world’s energy highway, where supertankers transport Middle Eastern oil to the burgeoning middle class fleshpots of the Pacific rim. . . . Indonesia seems to be on its way to becoming an authentically stable Muslim democracy.”

Kaplan argues that if the second Bush presidency was all about the spread of freedom and democracy, Indonesia perfectly followed the former president’s example: “It captured, prosecuted and executed the perpetrators of the Bali terrorist attack of 2002, and then went on to temper the rages of radicalism through electoral politics. More than any other country, Indonesia exemplifies Bush’s Wilsonian vision. In Indonesia, Islam is a religion and not a way of life. It is only one aspect of a heterodox society that still has Hindu and Buddhist underpinnings from earlier phases of its history. Radicalized societies like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan represent Islam’s past. Indonesia, where Islam must compete in the battle of ideas with secular and nationalist ideologies, represents its best case scenario for the future.”<sup>6</sup>

Indonesia’s history has often been one of adversity: colonization by the Dutch, World War II occupation by the Jap-

anese, Sukarno's flirtation with Communism, the horrors of *Gestapu* and the bloodbath that followed, Suharto's regime of autocratic corruption and a life of poverty and hardship for many, and Islamist terrorism that thankfully has been contained.

Now Indonesians are enjoying a period of relative peace and harmony. As Secretary of State Clinton puts it: "If you want to know whether Islam, democracy, modernity and women's rights can co-exist, go to Indonesia."<sup>7</sup> The nation is emerging as a moderating counterbalance to Islamic extremism. It is ready for a larger role in global affairs. It is a would-be peacemaker in the troubled Middle East. This is a trend that should be encouraged and supported with deft diplomacy by countries opposing the violent perversions of Islamic extremism.

### **The Case of Turkey**

If Indonesia, population 202 million, is a successful example of a non-Arab land where Islam and democracy coexist, the next most striking example is Turkey, population 74 million. Like Indonesia, Turkey is Islamic, a democracy, but not an Arab country. Like Indonesia, it is a nation that could play a significant role in helping thwart Islamic extremism.

Turkey has long been seen as a land-bridge between East and West. For decades it has looked westward to Europe. In recent times, however, it has been refurbishing its ties with

countries that border it, such as Iran, Iraq, and Syria. This includes plans to launch its own Arabic-language satellite TV station in an effort to connect with the Arab world.

In part this began as a reaction to the opposition of some European countries to Turkey's admission to the European Union. The opponents argued Turkey was not a European power.

In part it was because Turkey's new foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, a former professor of international relations, believes in a policy of "zero problems with neighbors." As part of this philosophy, Turkey ended a 16-year freeze in relations with Armenia. Turkey has also granted more cultural and political rights to its 14-million-strong Kurdish minority in a bid to ease tensions not only with them but with Kurds in Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

Relations between Turkey and the United States dipped in 2003 when the Turkish parliament refused to permit transit of American troops through Turkey to open a second front in the war with Iraq. With the election of Obama to the American presidency, and his early visit to Turkey for a key outreach speech to the Muslim world, the relationship has regained warmth. President Obama termed Turkey a "critical" ally, declared that the United States was "not at war with Islam," and concluded his speech in parliament by kissing Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on both cheeks.<sup>8</sup> President Obama's support for Turkey's bid for membership in the European Union also did not hurt.

Turkish officials were careful to explain that their renewed interest in the Muslim east did not mean a chill

towards the West. But Israeli actions in Gaza drew an angry response from Turkey.

Eyebrows were raised in Washington over some unusually warm Turkish congratulations for Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's questionable reelection, but other diplomats saw Turkey's pipeline to Iran useful for passing back-channel messages involved, for instance, with mediation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Indonesia and Turkey are powerful symbols for the Muslim world of the compatibility of democracy and Islam. They should be nurtured as important potential allies in the war of ideas with Islamic extremism.

For all its past anguish under Saddam Hussein, and the war thereafter, Iraq is limping towards democracy. With a free press, elections, and stabilization, in time, it too could become an example to the rest of the Arab world of concord between Islam and democracy. Over a longer and unpredictable time span even Pakistan, if it achieves stability, and although not an Arab country, could become another large country demonstrating concord between Islam and democracy. They are countries that could benefit from sophisticated U.S. public diplomacy.