



POMEAS

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Indonesia and the Arab Spring

Bülent Aras and Sinan Ekim



Is Indonesia a Model for the Arab Spring?

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Introduction

As the Arab Spring sent shockwaves across North Africa, the Western governments reached out to Indonesia for guidance, viewing the country with the largest Muslim population as an ideal model for the “Arab Spring” countries. The Obama administration turned to Jakarta to make sense of the events raging across the region, and to forge a trajectory of change that would bring these countries to where Indonesia had ended up. Indeed, it was the conviction of many, including the then US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, that the uprisings echoed what had transpired in Indonesia in the 1990s, when the country transformed itself from a dictatorship under Suharto into a functioning democracy.¹

Having passed through similar stages earlier, Indonesia has a democratic regime that still balances with success the dynamics of Islam, secularism and democracy. The democratic phase for Indonesia started in May 1998, when the residents of Jakarta took to the streets to protest against heavy political repression, corruption and the economic setbacks engendered by the Asian Financial Crisis. Soon thereafter, Indonesia embarked upon its journey from authoritarian rule to a democratic regime.

After General Suharto stepped down in 1999, the authoritarian structure of this government became deconstructed into a decentralized administrative system: it now distributes authority between the People’s Consultative Assembly, the president and the judicial branch at the top, and empowers local levels of civil society along the periphery.² This new structure therefore has peeled away from the excessive power vested in Jakarta and increased local participation in the polity.³

Another laudable facet of the post-Suharto Indonesia became the reduction of the sociopolitical role of the armed forces. Much like the leader of the every Arab Spring state, General Suharto, too, had relied on the backing of the military to remain firmly anchored in power.⁴ A constitutional amendment of 2004 deprived the military of the bloc of seats in the House of Representatives traditionally cordoned off for its elite – which led the armed forces to surrender their supremacy in favour of civilian rule and eventually withdraw back into the barracks.

In comparison to other South Asian states, Indonesia furthermore has an enviable record of a peaceful handover of government to the opposition. The last two Malaysian presidents, for instance, have jailed their predecessors; one-party communist rule has been in effect in Vietnam since its unification; and Thailand’s President still claims to draw its legitimacy from portraying himself as the sole protector of the monarchy. In contrast, Indonesia’s most recent elections in April 2014 witnessed 140 million people at the ballot-box (75% turn-out), followed by a smooth transition of power with every candidate accepting the results gracefully, including the former President Yudhoyono who did not turn to the men in uniform.⁵

Over the course of past three decades, Suharto’s authoritarianism then became replaced by a system based on political inclusiveness, free and fair elections that comply with the “Western” standards, reduction in the political role of the military, and an incorporation of Islamist organizations into the political spectrum in a way that enhanced democratic development – all of which are viewed by the “Western world” as the hallmarks of a genuine democracy.⁶ Their request was that Indonesia provided a template of actions and measures, which could then be effectively applied to steer the North African states out of their quagmire and towards the world of parliamentary democracies.

This paper deals with how Indonesia reflected upon its own experiences and responded to these calls for guidance. It will analyze Indonesia’s foreign policy under both Yudhoyono and his successor Jokowi, and extrapolate the overarching themes that are woven into Jakarta’s relations with the Arab World. Analysts are often quick to “make too much” of Jakarta’s *bebas aktif* foreign policy – a “free and active” approach to international relations that champions activism on the world-stage. As this study will suggest, this commitment to activism is often narrowly defined in terms of military involvement. Many also disregard the multiple aspects of Jakarta’s foreign policy that weigh heavily upon its stance vis-à-vis the Arab World, chief amongst which is the principle of non-interference. If examined through these vantage points, it will come to the fore that Indonesia has indeed honoured the obligations

of its *bebas aktif* policy – albeit in the form of soft-power activism. In view of Indonesia’s geographic isolation, the decision-makers weighed the merits of entanglement, and hesitated to become sucked into a series of events, from which the country could not derive any political or economic benefits. Instead, Jakarta wielded clout through the less transparent, albeit forceful, channels of lobbying that allowed Indonesia to engage “great powers” on initiatives without necessarily aligning with anyone.

The policy of “*bebas-aktif*”

In a speech on September 2, 1948, Indonesia’s first Prime Minister Mohammed Hatta laid out the key tenets that would constitute the basic premises of Jakarta’s foreign policy.⁷ As encapsulated in the phrase “*bebas-aktif*,” Hatta’s policy would lend emphasis to an “independent and free” Indonesia on the world-stage. It included a commitment to anti-colonialism, pursuing a line of action of consonant with the country’s domestic and international interests, and having absolute freedom in shaping policy without foreign meddling.⁸ As Hatta said in his speech, “Indonesia should be an independent agent, entitled to determine its own standpoint in a world that was becoming more intensely polarized.”⁹

This line is indeed important, for it elucidates the main drivers behind creating a *bebas* and *aktif* Indonesia. In the early years of the Cold War, this policy identified Indonesia’s place in the global political system that was quickly becoming polarized around American and Soviet power-blocs. Simply put, it registered Indonesia’s refusal to side with anyone. It was also meant to silence the contending voices amongst the policy-elite, who had contrasting opinions on what role Indonesia should play as member of the international community. Hatta’s foreign policy thus prevented the ideological rivalry between the United States and Russia from exploiting the tension at the executive level.¹⁰ In this sense, it served to protect Indonesian sovereignty, ensure the security of its borders – and perhaps more significantly, maintain national unity at a time when the country could have easily slipped under either sphere of influence.

Although the “*bebas-aktif*” approach to international relations should have kept Indonesia non-aligned and not linked up with a superpower, the country was still closer to the US in the immediate aftermath of independence, demonstrated through the signing of a Mutual Security

Act (MSA) in 1952.¹¹ An analysis of Indonesia’s foreign policy from the 1950s through to 1980s suggests that Jakarta lent more emphasis to independence, rather than activism in the earlier years of this policy’s execution: for instance, Indonesia’s 8th Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo established ties with the Soviet Union in 1954 and organized an Afro-African conference in Bandung in April 1955.¹² By contrast, the 1980s would witness an Indonesia assuming more active roles on the regional stage. It restored diplomatic ties with China in August 1990; chaired the non-Aligned Movement between 1992 and 1995; and hosted the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in November 1994.¹³ As this very brief overview indicates, *bebas* and *aktif* would remain the key tenets of Indonesian foreign policy, and the incumbents would determine how independent and active Jakarta would be, in light of the country’s changing national objectives and security threats both in the region and the wider global context.

Foreign policy under Yudhoyono and Jokowi

In his 2005 speech to the Indonesian Council for World Affairs, Yudhoyono said he would pursue a “constructive approach to international relations, engage regional and global actors, and serve as a mediator, peacekeeper and confidence builder.”¹⁴ His maxim was “a million friends and no enemies,” in view of which the President shaped the country’s foreign policy. In order to make “a million friends,” Indonesia was keen to work within the international milieu; to maintain “zero enemies,” it would keep silent in disputes of global scale and not run the risk of alienating anyone.

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of participation in numerous regional organizations, such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Southwest Pacific Dialogue (SwPD) and Asian Cooperation dialogue (ACD). He also launched the Asian Defense Ministers Meeting, and partook in discussions that culminated in the organization of the

East Asia Summit, where all powers pledged to work together towards regional security. In his capacity as a participant at the G20 Summit, the President also “proposed initiatives in multilateral development bank reform and assistance for emerging markets during global crises.”¹⁵ Under his supervision in 2012, Jakarta attempted to broker an end to the conflict along the Thailand/Cambodian border, and tried to break through the diplomatic impasse over disputes between states surrounding the South China Sea.¹⁶

Many assumed that these early developments would have triggered an unstoppable wave of international roles. This wave, however, ran on certain undercurrents that shaped its overall direction: although willing to address problems of democracy, Yudhoyono’s foreign policy remained rooted in non-alignment and neutrality. For instance, the chief purpose of the Bali Democracy Forum, which Indonesia launched in 2008 for the Asia-Pacific countries, was to discuss the concepts and skills required for peace-building and peacekeeping through international exchanges, joint missions and network building. As many have misinterpreted, this did not suggest that Jakarta would deploy troops or personnel to supervise or preside over a country’s transition to democracy.

This policy of non-intervention also serves some “self-ish” objectives.

Yudhoyono also agreed to co-chair the UNSC high-level panel on post-2015 development agenda, and introduced an intergovernmental commission on the human rights under the auspices of the ASEAN.¹⁷ This branch, nonetheless, functions merely as a consultative body and is devoid of any legal mechanisms to enforce any regulations – affording Indonesia the necessary measures to keep together its neutrality.

For Indonesia, then, espousing a “free and active” policy meant promoting human rights and democratic governance with a soft touch. It seemed more than willing to offer guidance, yet exercised precaution towards assisting a country’s efforts to realize these objectives. This would weigh heavily on Indonesia’s stance vis-à-vis the Arab Springs and characterize its foreign policy, when The Foreign Minister Natalegawa travelled to Cairo in April 2011¹⁸The official purpose of this trip was

promulgated as to share Indonesia’s experience. At the same time, Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, in his capacity as the deputy-speaker of People’s Consultative Assembly, confirmed Jakarta’s role as a mediator, stating that the Parliament looked favorably upon Indonesia’s activism in steering Egypt towards a more democratic future. Indonesia also partook in a US-led “mission for peace and understanding” in February 2012, which included training sessions and seminars with political and civil leaders in Egypt and Tunisia.¹⁹

It is often overlooked, however, that Yudhoyono’s statements were always impregnated with cautious rhetoric: the President stated multiple times, and would be prompted to comment again in July 2013 in reaction to the deadly clashes between Morsi and the Egyptian military, “[Indonesia is] not advising Egypt, [they] do not have a recipe.”²⁰Yudhoyono furthermore refrained from providing any technical assistance for the ouster of Mubarak in 2011, and made it clear that Indonesia was not in a position to “lecture” the rebels on how to realize their objectives. Similarly throughout the Syrian crisis, Indonesia reiterated its will to see Assad surrender his power in favour of a leadership accepted by all Syrian parties, yet did not follow this up with substantive action.²¹ It even abstained from voting on a UNGA Resolution condemning the Assad regime in May 2013; it disagreed with the decisions to recognize the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as the interlocutor, asserting that “these resolutions contained elements that ran counter to international law,” such as an unwarranted intervention into Syria’s internal affairs.²² It should be noted that, although Jakarta might have voted in favour of the previous UNGA Resolution on Syria in 2012, this had only called for cessation of hostilities and promotion of stability – not for the dispatch of any armed forces or authorities.²³

This policy of non-intervention also serves some “self-ish” objectives. Like that of every other country, there are parts of its track record that Indonesia would rather keep unexposed. One of them is its human rights record. In this respect, not playing an active role on the world-stage allows Jakarta to avoid criticism. Indonesia has even refused to ratify the Rome Statute of International Criminal Court, so as not to expose the country to unwanted attention. This allowed Jakarta to keep away international lawyers, who would otherwise have severely reprimanded the authorities for the human rights violations committed in East Timor in 1976.²⁴

Breaking neutrality could also harm economic relations with Indonesia's regional partners. As will be discussed more in depth below, the country's economy is almost dependent upon trade with China, and adopting a raucous tone when addressing such topics as human rights and protection of sovereignty has the potential of fracturing the economic ties. For instance, Indonesia's self-appropriated role as a mediator in the region, and its disapproving stance vis-à-vis China's violation of territorial rights in the South China Sea, has generated a lingering sense of distrust between Jakarta and Beijing; should this manifest into active involvement, it is very likely to draw Beijing's ire and produce negative ramifications for the former's economy.²⁵

Staying away from any extreme measures of involvement then helps Indonesia avoid a break in friendly relations with the international community. By virtue of its geographical distance from the epicenter of the Arab Spring, Indonesia would not be directly affected by the outcome of the Libyan civil war or by the fate of the governments in Cairo and Tunisia; it also does not have any interest in influencing the revolutionary changes underway in Syria towards a certain direction. The fact that Indonesia had nothing to obtain from the

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outcome of these struggles encouraged the authorities to keep together their unwillingness to force events on the ground. Accordingly, Yudhoyono opted in favour of wielding soft power by providing guidance on how to successfully manage a democratic transition, instead of displaying hard power by actually assisting this transition step-by-step.

His successor Joko Widodo's, or more affectionately known as Jokowi, inauguration as the new President on 20 October 2014 ushered in a new dawn for the Foreign Ministry. What sets him apart from his predecessor is that he lacks a membership amongst Jakarta's elite and does not have a military pedigree. Before he put his name down on the presidential ticket, he had served as the mayor of Surakarta in 2005 and had ris-

en to the post of Governor of Jakarta in 2012.²⁶ These factors have led Jokowi to portray himself more as a "domestic reformer than an international statesmen."²⁷

According to Jokowi, courting the global spotlight will not be a priority. The Foreign Ministry, however, is likely present a major obstacle in this regard, as Indonesian diplomats have continued in their positions from the Yudhoyono era and are therefore staunch advocates of an internationalist outlook.²⁸ The Ministry is therefore not to be lulled into a state of slumber, and at least throughout the formative years of the Jokowi administration, will continue to function as an engine of proactive diplomacy à la Yudhoyono. The future trajectory of Indonesia's foreign relations then remains unclear. Keeping in mind that Jokowi will have to balance his own interests with those of the Foreign Ministry, the President may confine the sphere of his policy vision to regional parameters. This way, he will have appeased the ambitions of his diplomats as well as addressed regional issues that are connected to domestic troubles.

The lack of a former career in politics could also work to Jokowi's advantage. With no links to the military or the Suharto leadership, he could end the "tradition" of political horse-trading with the ruling coalition; he even promised during the campaign trail that he would form a "cabinet of experts" that had the public's best interests at heart, instead of appointing strong politicians that pursued their own agenda.²⁹ This will allow Jokowi to follow a foreign policy largely free from the manipulation of the older elite; instead of moving ahead with an internationalist worldview, he will then have a chance to restrict Indonesia's activism to its neighbourhood.³⁰ He has already taken steps to this end, grappling, for instance, with the issue of around 5,000 ships that operate illegally in Indonesian waters. Settling maritime border disputes with the Philippines and Malaysia, and enhancing the protection of Indonesian workers abroad are both laudable goals to this end.³¹ As the situation currently stands, therefore, the Middle East is not likely to appear on Jokowi's agenda.

Indonesia's response to the ISIS and rising fundamentalism

This is not to suggest, however, that Jokowi will be against cooperation per se, or will eschew the possibility of alignment with a "great power," should it serve its national interest. On 30 October 2014, the commander of Indonesia's Armed Forces, General Moeldoko, told a public lecture in Singapore that the regional forces

should consolidate their efforts to counter the extremist threat from ISIS.³² Jakarta has also been keen to cooperate with Washington to tackle the ISIS threat; General Moeldoko had even asked Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, if Indonesia's senior commanders could partake in the meetings of Washington's anti-IS taskforce.³³ In another remarkable shift in policy, Indonesia signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement with Saudi Arabia in January 2014 to forge a joint exercise on counter-terrorism.³⁴

This, however, does not suggest that Indonesia is now advancing into deepening commitment on the world stage. The caveat is that, in addition to being a global phenomenon, the threat of Islamic extremism is also a domestic concern. In July 2014, a video titled "Join the Ranks" in the Bahasa language featured a militant clad in the black ISIS uniform, calling on Indonesian to join the Caliphate. It is estimated that roughly 2,000 recruits from Indonesia have pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi's Islamic State, and allegedly have even formed a smaller militant unit, made up of Indonesians and Malaysians, called Katibah Nusantara.³⁵ Many of these recruits are radicalized, young Indonesian Muslims with Western passports, who are granted easy access to the Levant by virtue of their travel documents. An overwhelming number of them, it is speculated, have also established extensive connections with the existing terrorist cells across Indonesia that have the funds at their disposal to cover the militants' expenses and obtain a letter of recommendation from an ISIS member – which is apparently a prerequisite for membership.³⁶

It is feared that the veteran of the Syrian jihad might launch proxy-war on Indonesian soil upon their return, provide leadership to incompetent jihadi movements in rural areas and develop these amateur fighters into a competent terrorist unit. Abu Wardah Santoso, the leader of the East Asian Mujahedin and the first Indonesian to swear allegiance to al-Baghdadi, is also believed to be operating from a jungle retreat on the island of Sulawesi, which has long served³⁷ as a hideout for extremists with its remote mountain ranges. Unofficially labeled as "the symbolic heart of ISIS in Indonesia," he has serious field experience in Indonesia's most notorious militant outfits – and thus the capacity to train footsoldiers for Iraq and Syria.³⁸ On 19 September 2013, a joint force formed by the police and Indonesian Military Unit discovered his hiding place in the Poso Pesisir district in Poso regency in central Sulawesi, but Santoso is still active and yet to

be tracked down.³⁹ Now that these cells are also operating fund-raising campaigns, purportedly for the "final showdown" in Syria, they may channel these funds to their own coffers, strengthen their resources and inflict more peril in Indonesia.⁴⁰

In addition to drawing a myriad of Indonesian youth into the Syrian war, the strengthening link with ISIS poses another threat. Indonesia has long been a scene of anti-Christian violence in the region, and the past decade has witnessed a proliferation in cases of religiously-motivated violence: Human Rights Watch, for instance, has reported 216 cases of religious attacks in 2010 and 184 in 2011 through September. These abuses persisted throughout Yudhoyono's presidency and into the Jokowi administration: the Jakarta-based Setara Institute that monitors religious freedom recorded 230 attacks on religious minorities in 2013 and 107 cases in 2014 through November, targeting the constituents of Indonesia's diverse population, including Christians, the Ahmadiyah, Shia Muslims and indigenous faith believers.⁴¹

To be certain, Indonesia's counter-terrorism unit, Special Detachment Unit 88, has launched successful crackdowns on suspected militants. Since its formation in 2003, the Indonesian security forces have arrested more than 700 militants and killed more than 60.⁴² This counter-terrorism unit also arrested 10 militants and seized 12 handmade explosives from a group suspected of plotting to blow up the Parliament building in August 2012.

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It furthermore imprisoned 11 people in September 2012, implicated in a plot to attack foreign and domestic targets that include high-profile sites, such as the US Embassy, the Australian Embassy, and the Jakarta-branch of the American mining company Freeport McMoran Copper and Gold. Operating under the auspices of Harakah Sunni for Indonesian Society, these extremists had also advanced plans to attack the US Consulate in Surabaya and the headquarters of a special police force in Java.⁴³

Despite these successes in combatting fundamentalism, they are far from curbing either the threat of terrorism or religiously-inspired violence. The authorities are therefore worried that, if the fundamentalist cells become emboldened through a stronger connection with al-Baghdadi's organization, this may furnish them with more confidence to expand the scope of their operations.⁴⁴ As discussed, Jokowi is likely to throw Indonesia's weight behind international efforts to battle against ISIS. This, however, will not come through the President's willingness for more commanding presence on the world-stage, but his efforts to find solutions to issues that engender domestic instability.

Prospect for Indonesia in the Middle East: Not so bright?

Somewhat aligned with its political objectives, Indonesia's economy, too, revolves around projects in the region. In 2013, for instance, its top 10 trading partners were, in sequence of their ranking, China, Japan, Singapore, European Union, USA, Malaysia, South Korea, India, Thailand and Australia – i.e. mostly regional partners.⁴⁵ Sino-Indonesian trade had already been substantially strengthened under Yudhoyono, as their mutual trade quadrupled to 66 billion USD between 2005 and 2013, and investment soared to 2 billion USD.⁴⁶ A high-level meeting between China and Indonesia in January 2015 furthermore signaled that this approach to Sino-Indonesia relations would be much more concrete. Jokowi furthermore joined the Chinese-led Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, and agreed to enhance cooperation in the field of infrastructure development and power plant cooperation.⁴⁷

In fact, the President has not demonstrated the same enthusiasm towards revitalizing economic ties with the Arab World. This is not to suggest that none of the South Asian countries have explored the benefits of entering into financial transactions with its members. For example, the UAE Petroleum Investment Company invested 6.7 billion USD in an oil storage site in Malaysia, while Qatar has conveyed 4 billion USD towards a petrochemical project in Vietnam.⁴⁸ In return, Jakarta could invest in the construction sectors in Saudi Arabia and Qatar to solve the housing shortage: Riyadh is expected to need at least 50,000 housing units per year for the next years, and has launched a 67 billion USD worth project to build 100,000 houses. The cachet is the high demand for wooden products, which Indonesia is a condition to supply with its 1 billion USD worth of exports in timber.⁴⁹ Towards this market, Jokowi has

so far remained unresponsive.

In addition, Indonesia is trying to meet its domestic consumption demand, which grew by 44% between 2002 and 2012. The declining oil production and the rising domestic demand evolved into such a problem that it caused the country's exit from OPEC in 2009.⁵⁰ Yet, this has not yet prompted Jakarta to explore any contracts with the oil-rich Arab Springs countries: a year before the uprisings erupted, the five top-ranking countries on Jakarta's list of origins of petroleum imports included Saudi Arabia (with 36.15% share), with Libya and Algeria (as the only Arab Spring countries) ranking as sixth with 2.02% and seventh with 1.75% share, respectively.⁵¹ In 2012, nearly one-fourth of crude oil imports came from Saudi Arabia, followed by Nigeria, Azerbaijan, UAE, Qatar and Malaysia.⁵²

There are a couple of reasons why this might be, first of which is the fact that Indonesia does not have any linkages with international oil pipelines and a few domestic pipelines – a condition that renders maritime trade the most viable option. In this regard, the country is dependent on the seaborne trade routes that transport oil shipments to the Asian markets, which are currently manipulated by the Persian Gulf suppliers.⁵³ For Indonesia, the strategic oil-providing countries are then Saudi Arabia, Arabian Gulf countries (Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, the UAE and Oman) and countries west of the Suez Canal (Libya and Algeria). To strengthen its ties with some of these countries, Indonesia has taken a few steps.

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Relevant in this regard is the business meeting in Jeddah on 4 February 2013, which was attended by Indonesian and Saudi Arabian business owners. Yudhoyono urged the Saudi businessmen to invest in his country, especially in energy, minerals and agricultural sectors, and welcomed the plan to open an office in Jakarta of the Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank.⁵⁴ Yudhoyono also received the Iranian foreign minister Mohammed Zarif and his Indonesian counterpart Marty Natalegawa in March 2014 to discuss trade cooperation. Indonesia's activism in the region is then

rather trade-indexed; unlike the Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa, it does not seem too concerned about balancing the Saudi-Iranian dynamics.

Also, the Indonesian government is refocusing its energy policy by switching its basic source of power to coal – an affordable mineral that is also available in abundance. Encouraging the use of coal is connected to the country's finances.⁵⁵ Jokowi has promised to increase electricity supply and outlined a programme to deliver 25,000 MW of new power by 2019. Honouring this pledge by building power-plants or oil refineries does not seem viable; according to PLN, Indonesia's government-owned State Electricity Company, the demand for electricity has increased by 9.4% per annum for the past five years and the demand for power will double in eight years.⁵⁶ By contrast, analysts estimate that Indonesia produces on average 370 million metric tonnes per year; in fact, its coal output reached 425 million metric tonnes in 2014, and exceeded the total demand by 4.9 million tonnes.⁵⁷ Using coal to generate energy then renders at Indonesia's disposal decades' worth of fuel to power economic growth. This, in return, has diminished the need for petroleum supplies, and correlatively, a livelier trade with the Arab Spring countries.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Indonesia's foreign policy vis-à-vis the Arab Spring has been characterized by prudent activism. It followed a low-profile line of policy towards non-pivotal countries. This rendered the revolutionary changes largely irrelevant to Jakarta's foreign

agenda and thus unworthy of "serious" commitments. Indonesia does not have its own vision for the Middle East, and nor does it try to forge more advantageous conditions by changing the political landscape. In return, its approach towards the Arab World is balanced against these realities: since involvement in the messy changes underway does not offer any political or financial benefits, Jakarta is cautious not become entangled within the web of responsibilities that accompany hard-power activism.

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Indonesia then wielded soft power as a democratic, Muslim country that was willing to share its know-how with other Muslim countries in the process of democratic transformation. Yet in the absence of any concerns to secure a certain outcome, Jakarta did not find any value in deploying troops to topple down dictators, or dispatching political experts to ensure a successful transition. Both Yudhoyono and Jokowi have kept their unwillingness to force events on the ground, and conveyed their attention towards their immediate neighbourhood – where, unlike the Arab World, they had vested interests.

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About the Authors:

Bülent Aras is academic coordinator of the Project on the Middle East and the Arab Spring (POMEAS). He is professor of international relations at Sabancı University and global fellow at Wilson Center. Aras was chairman of the Center for Strategic Research (SAM) and the Diplomatic Academy at Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs between 2010 and 2013. He was Senior Visiting Professor of Turkish Studies at St. Anthony's College, University of Oxford in 2010.

Sinan Ekim is Research Assistant at Istanbul Policy Centre. He is a recent graduate of the London School of Economics and Political Science and was previously with the Istituto Affari Internazionali in Rome.

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Project on the Middle East and the Arab Spring (POMEAS) arose in response to the upheavals that started in 2011 across the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the subsequent developments of an unfolding regional process that mixed disappointments with opportunities. Building on the idea that the processes of academic inquiry, debate and public discussion can contribute to the emergence of a democratic political culture, it aims to initiate a forum open and accessible to people throughout the Middle East and beyond. POMEAS seeks to have impacts on both the discourse of experts and the climate of public opinion.

Email : pomeasproject@pomeas.org

Phone : +90 212 292 4939

Fax : +90 212 292 4957

Location: POMEAS Project IPC Downtown Office

Bankalar Caddesi, No: 2 Sabancı University Karaköy Minerva Han 34420 Karaköy / Istanbul – TURKEY

Website : www.pomeas.org