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**No. 236**

**Indonesia's Democratic Politics and Foreign Policy-Making:  
A Case Study of Iranian Nuclear Issue, 2007-2008**

**Iisgindarsah**

**S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies  
Singapore**

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## Abstract

This paper studies the impact of domestic politics upon Indonesia's foreign policy-making. Serving as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council from 2007 to 2008, Indonesia voted on two key resolutions concerning the Iranian nuclear issue. While approving international sanctions against Iran under UNSC Resolution No. 1747, the Indonesian government preferred to abstain from voting on Resolution No. 1803. This paper argues the country's changing response to the Iranian nuclear issue was a consequence of domestic opposition. The case study specifically identifies the interplay between majority Moslem population, religious mass organizations and political parties as key factors which weigh upon the "strategic calculus" behind Indonesia's foreign policy formulation. The paper will conclude while the executive still drives the country's foreign policy, the parliament and social-political groups have new powers to cajole and criticize the government into reversing or softening an established policy.

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**Iisgindarsah** is a Researcher at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Jakarta. Previously, he was a Research Analyst at Indonesia Programme, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore. Iis holds a Master degree in International Relations from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Indonesia (2009). He also earned a Master degree in Strategic Studies at the, Nanyang Technological University (2010). His research interests are mostly on military transformation, civil-military relations, security sector governance in Indonesia and geopolitics in Asia-Pacific. Iis has been involved in policy research on a number of defence and security issues for Indonesia's governmental institutions and legislative body.

# Indonesia's Democratic Politics and Foreign Policy-Making: A Case Study of Iranian Nuclear Issue, 2007-2008<sup>▲</sup>

## Introduction

Does the government remain the key actor in Indonesia's foreign policy-making today? Under what conditions do domestic political forces come into play in that process? This set of questions is theoretically significant given that foreign policy is naturally a state-centric and executive-driven process. It also finds its relevance in the policy realm. In line with national political reforms over a decade, constitutional amendments have enabled the Indonesian parliament (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, DPR) to review the country's foreign policy and ratify international agreements signed by the government.<sup>1</sup> The case study in this paper demonstrates these two features at play.

Following its election as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the period 2007-2008, the Indonesian government engaged in high-level decision-making on many issues of international security, particularly Iran's nuclear programme. How Indonesia handled this issue in the arena of domestic politics present a fascinating case study that unveils the core dynamics of foreign policy formation in Indonesia. In 2007, Indonesia supported UNSC Resolution No. 1747 imposing international sanctions against the Iranian government for its uranium enrichment activities.<sup>2</sup> However, in 2008, Indonesia decided to abstain in the voting of Resolution No. 1803.<sup>3</sup>

This incident supports a long established theory in the international relations literature that the domestic environment of a given country cannot be detached from the

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<sup>▲</sup> The author wishes to convey his gratitude to Dr. Leonard C. Sebastian and Dr. David Eric Jansen for their thoughtful advices to deepen the analysis of this paper. The author also thanks Yoes Chandra Kenawas for supplying relevant materials.

<sup>1</sup> For more details on how members of parliament shape Indonesia's foreign policy, see Jurgen Ruland, "Deepening ASEAN Cooperation through Democratization? The Indonesian Legislature and Foreign Policymaking," *International Relations of the Asia Pacific*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2009), pp. 373-402.

<sup>2</sup> See "Indonesia Ikut Setuju," *Kompas* (26 March 2007).

<sup>3</sup> See "Indonesia Abstains in UN Vote on Iran," *Jakarta Post* (5 March 2008).

development of its foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> Following Indonesia's support of Resolution 1747, the government of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had to endure sharp criticisms from many socio-political groups, most notably Moslem mass organizations.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, less than two months after the adoption of the resolution, the President announced the second reshuffle of his cabinet. This apparently displeased some political parties in the government's coalition.<sup>6</sup> Many party elites went on to condemn Resolution 1747, while members of parliament exercised their "right of interpellation" (*hak interpelasi*) to summon the president to inquire into the government's approval of the resolution.<sup>7</sup> This paper will argue that such political manoeuvres on what was ostensibly an international issue were in fact intimately linked to squabbles and disenchantment over cabinet posts.<sup>8</sup>

In this context, this paper argues that despite the technocratic nature of Indonesia's foreign policy-making, domestic political forces have gained new powers in the current democratic political atmosphere. They are most likely to exert their influence upon Indonesian foreign policy if it affects their ideological lines and political interests on a given international issue. To this end, this paper seeks to analyze the political context within Indonesia leading to the government's decision to abstain in the voting for the adoption of Resolution 1803. *Firstly*, it provides a conceptual framework on the role of domestic political forces in shaping a country's foreign policy. *Secondly*, the paper will describe the ideological perceptions and interests of each social-political actor. *Thirdly*, it will assess to what extent these groups have been able to influence the government's decisions in voting for the UNSC resolutions upon Iran. *Lastly*, the paper concludes by providing lessons learnt from the case study in respect of the Indonesian government's ambitions to play a greater international role.

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<sup>4</sup> See James N. Rosenau, *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1967).

<sup>5</sup> See "RI Slammed over Iran Resolution," *Jakarta Post* (26 March 2007).

<sup>6</sup> See Sultani, "'Reshuffle' Pilihan Sulit Buat Presiden," *Kompas* (20 March 2007).

<sup>7</sup> See "Interpelasi Resolusi 1747 Bergulir Cepat," *Kompas* (28 March 2007).

<sup>8</sup> See "Indonesia's Nuclear Diplomacy," *Jakarta Post* (14 March 2008).

## Conceptualising Indonesia's Contemporary Foreign Policy Formulation

Foreign policy is state-centric by its nature. It comprises the set of measures and guidelines pursued by a given state towards external actors or specific international issues of concern. At this point, the realist scholarship of foreign policy analysis is the most matured and well-established discipline due to either its long-standing historical merit or intellectual attractiveness. Within the realist tradition, neoclassical realism is a relatively recent theory that combines the key features of the classical and neo-realism.<sup>9</sup> It believes in the value of the domestic realm for a better understanding of a specific foreign policy decision. Its model of foreign policy analysis places internal conditions of a state as an intervening variable between systemic constraints or incentives and the state's decisions or actions. This model therefore facilitates scholars to look into decision-making process, inquire the *raison d'être* that leads a government to take a particular course of actions and consequential effects of those action in domestic and international realms.

Foreign policy-making is essentially an executive-formed and elite-driven process. In that process, decision makers develop a reciprocal relationship with many domestic actors that attempt to influence government's policies and decisions.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, decision makers require political support from domestic political actors to implement government policies throughout the country. In return for their support, the latter makes certain demands on decision makers.<sup>11</sup> There are many ways for decision makers to build political consensus on a specific policy issue, while domestic actors also have a number of available channels to convey their interests to the former.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For some scholarly literatures on neoclassical realism, see William C. Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Randal Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Steven E. Lobell, et al., *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> See William D. Coplin. *Introduction to International Politics: A Theoretical Overview* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1971), p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> See Coplin (1971), p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> See Coplin (1971), p. 69.

Although the government's policy sometimes may not satisfy political demands, it should at least meet the minimum expectation of its constituents.<sup>13</sup>

Given the “policy-influence” mechanism, analysing a state's foreign policy requires one to take cognisance of the character of its national political system—either open or closed.<sup>14</sup> After more than a decade of national political reforms, Indonesia has adopted an open political system with a multi-party system and democratic legal-constitutional mechanisms. Although the executive remains in the driving seat of Indonesia's foreign policy setting, the parliament now holds constitutional right to conduct legal inquiries into the country's foreign policy, ratify international agreements signed by the government, and approve or reject the president's nominee for ambassadorial posts.<sup>15</sup>

Having adopted a democratic political system, foreign policy-making in Indonesia has become more complicated due to the diverse political groupings competing to influence the government's decisions. The parliamentary review process and Indonesia's political culture, which favours coalition-building between president and political parties, have increased the burden of the executive's responsibility in foreign policy formation. Electoral politics also complicates the “risk calculus” in decision-making. Accordingly, a “radical” foreign policy that is out of favour with public opinion becomes politically risky for an administration founded on multi-party coalition; something, at least in theory, less likely to occur in today's context.

Indonesia's response to the UNSC resolutions on Iran is an unusual example that demonstrates the impact of domestic disapproval upon the country's foreign policy. Despite the president being the top decision maker in foreign affairs, the parliament's right of policy review is likely to gain its sharpness when public opinion diametrically opposed to a particular policy. It is very rare for any foreign policy issue to achieve nation-wide consensus. This leads to the assumption that Indonesia's decision on UNSC voting was likely shaped by the ideological boundaries of various domestic political forces and preferences within the archipelagic country.

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<sup>13</sup> See Coplin (1971), p. 65.

<sup>14</sup> See Coplin (1971), p. 69.

<sup>15</sup> See Article 6, 9, 10 in Law No. 37/1999 on Indonesia's Foreign Affairs.

In that respect, the paper identifies four key actors with their respective capacity to influence Indonesia's foreign policy-making, namely executive, partisan organisations, interest groups, and public elements. The executive refers to officials and agencies within the government's bureaucratic structure. Functionally, these actors hold the primary responsibility to formulate and implement foreign policy decisions.<sup>16</sup> As this paper seeks to analyse the impact of domestic politics upon foreign policy-making in Indonesia, it will concentrate on the roles of domestic actors outside the decision making structure—including interest groups, partisan groups, and the public voices that attempt to influence and shape the Indonesian government's decision on UNSC voting.

Public voices refer to the popular discourses or opinions in public domains that are aired and circulated through news articles or programs in the mass media. In an open political system, decision makers may calibrate foreign policy on the basis of public approval. Besides this, opinion polling and other measures of gauging public sentiments are invaluable source of information for decision makers to approximate the levels of public approval of the government's performance and political support for the incumbent or aspirant candidates in any upcoming elections.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, an interest group is a collection of individuals with common interests—material, ideological or otherwise—attempting to achieve a common goal through the mobilization of relevant resources to gain support from other social-political groups. In an open political system, there are a wide range of associations and social groups with diverse organizational interests and approaches to build up their respective power bases. In the following section, Moslem mass organizations (*organisasi massa*) emerge as groups that can be clustered into this category. Given their ability to mobilize resources, interest groups present a more direct, insistent type of pressure on decision makers than public opinion alone.<sup>18</sup>

Lastly, a partisan group refers to party elites and legislative members that play a key role in absorbing and transforming interest groups and public aspirations into solid political demands. Political parties can influence decision-making through voting,

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<sup>16</sup> See Coplin (1971), p. 71.

<sup>17</sup> See Coplin (1971), pp. 76-78.

<sup>18</sup> See Coplin (1971), pp. 74-76.



lobbying, public criticisms, and other forms of pressures. In the foreign policy realm, partisan organizations are likely to pay greater attention to government policies and decisions that are of interest to their respective constituents. In countries with an open political system, it is usual to have different views among party members, even within a same party. What matters is the level of internal party cohesion and discipline. If a political party has strong discipline, the debates on contentious issue will only occur within the party and elected representatives in parliament will be reluctant to express views against their party's guidelines or decisions. On the contrary, if a party lacks internal discipline, its cadres are more likely to express their views in the public domain, while its legislative members cast their votes according to their own judgement.<sup>19</sup>

In the next sections, this case study will highlight the interplay between ideological perceptions and political interests of these actors on the Indonesian government's decisions on Iran's nuclear programme in the UNSC. Given that Iran is an Islamic theocracy, the Indonesian government's support for Resolution 1747 was received negatively by the country's Moslem population. The public sentiments erupted in parallel with harsh statements from notable leaders of many Moslem mass organizations. The anger of the masses and Islamic leaders intertwined with the interests of some political parties, who felt disappointed with President Yudhoyono's decision to reshuffle his cabinet. This constellation of events—inauspicious as it was for the government—empowered members of parliament to exercise the legislature's right of interpellation in order to embarrass President Yudhoyono.

### **Iran's Nuclear Issue and Indonesia Approval to UNSC Resolution 1747**

As members of the United Nations and parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), all signatory countries—including Iran and Indonesia, are required to comply with all international protocols and provisions related to the use, research and development of nuclear technologies. Iran's nuclear programme turned into an international issue soon after the publication of the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) report

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<sup>19</sup> See Coplin (1971), pp. 72-73.

on 24 September 2005.<sup>20</sup> It concluded that the Iranian government had failed to report several aspects of its uranium enrichment projects according to the Safeguard Agreements of the NPT. Due to its inability to act in accordance with international security requirements, the United States, European powers and regional countries in the Middle East became increasingly anxious.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, the UNSC adopted Resolution No. 1696 on 31 July 2006 urging the Iranian government to cooperate with IAEA and fulfil its obligations to the NPT within 30 days.<sup>22</sup> Given that Tehran remained unmoved and allowed the deadline to pass without action, the UNSC issued Resolution 1737 imposing international sanctions against her. It also demanded that Iran cease uranium enrichment projects in several nuclear reactors within 60 days.<sup>23</sup> In an IAEA report on 22 February 2007, Mohammad El-Baradei, the Director General, maintained that his agency had been unable to draw a conclusion that Iran's nuclear programme was peaceful given that the country had continued its uranium enrichment activities and construction of heavy water reactors. Based on the IAEA Director General's report, the permanent members of UNSC—including the United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France—plus Germany as the Chairman of European Union (P5+1) agreed to propose a new draft resolution on Iran.

Having been appointed as a non-permanent member of the UNSC for the period of 2007-2008, Indonesia for the first time was involved in the discussion of the draft resolution to address the Iranian nuclear issue. In principle, the Indonesian government supported the Iranian nuclear programme as long as it was intended for peaceful purposes and carried out transparently under IAEA supervision and verification<sup>24</sup> To endorse a peaceful solution on the Iranian nuclear issue, Indonesia put forward several amendments to the initial draft sponsored by P5+1. The

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<sup>20</sup> See IAEA, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," 24 September 2005.

<sup>21</sup> See Greg Jaffe and Neil King, Jr., "U.S. Courts Allies' Support on Iran," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 January 2007, Tariq Khaitous, "Why Arab Leaders Worry about Iran's Nuclear Program," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 23 May 2008.

<sup>22</sup> See "Resolution 1696," adopted by the United Nations Security Council at 5500th meeting on 31 July 2006.

<sup>23</sup> See "Resolution 1737," adopted by the United Nations Security Council at 5612th meeting on 23 December 2007.

<sup>24</sup> See "Penjelasan Pemerintah Republik Indonesia Mengenai Dukungan Terhadap Resolusi Dewan Keamanan PBB No. 1747 Pada Sidang Paripurna DPR-RI," Jakarta, 10 July 2007.

amendments included: *first*, affirming that all parties of the NPT, including Iran have the right to develop nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes; *second*, the inclusion of a reference regarding the need to establish a weapons-of-mass-destruction free zone in the Middle East; *third*, suggesting that the negotiation processes are to be carried out in the spirit of “good will to reach immediate solutions that are mutually acceptable to all parties”; and *fourth*, highlighting the need to suspend and terminate international sanctions against Iran if it complies with all the provisions provided in the UNSC resolutions.<sup>25</sup> Following the acceptance of all proposed amendments by the UNSC’s permanent and non-permanent members, the Indonesian government approved Resolution 1747.<sup>26</sup>

While underscoring peaceful negotiation to resolve Iran’s nuclear issue, Resolution 1747 also encompassed a number of international sanctions against the country. Besides the preceding sanctions under Resolution 1737, the UNSC imposed additional restrictive measures, including an arms embargo, prohibiting all kinds of financial aid or loans—except for humanitarian and developmental purposes, and freezing valuable assets owned by 28 government officials and institutions related to Iran’s nuclear programme.<sup>27</sup> No less important, the UNSC called on the Iranian government to comply with all requirements stipulated in the resolution within 60 days; otherwise it would endure more severe sanctions in the future. The inclusion of international sanctions against Iran in turn ignited strong resentment from many constituencies in Indonesia.

### **Indonesia’s Grass-roots Opposition to UNSC Resolution 1747**

Although Resolution 1747 provided no clauses concerning the potential use of force against Iran, Indonesia’s approval of additional sanctions against the country incited massive domestic resistance from various social-political groups and the public at

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<sup>25</sup> See “Usulan Perubahan RI Diterima,” *Kompas* (27 March 2007); “Resolusi Baru DK Soal Iran Dibahas,” *Kompas* (22 March 2007).

<sup>26</sup> See Tempo Magazine’s interview with Indonesia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time, Hassan Wirajuda in “Solusi Damai, Masak, Kita Tolak,” *Tempo* (9-15 April 2007).

<sup>27</sup> See “Resolution 1747,” adopted by the United Nations Security Council at 5647th meeting on 24 March 2007.

large. With respect to the *public element* of this equation, Indonesia hosts the world's largest Moslem population. It was therefore natural if most of them felt sympathetic towards Iran that adopted Islamic theocracy, while opposing the Western countries and their policies towards Iran. They also tended to view the Iranian nuclear issue either as a "clash of civilizations" or great powers' intimidation of Moslem countries in general.

The Indonesian public's negative response to Resolution 1747 was evident in several polls conducted by various national newspapers. Kompas, a leading national daily, conducted a revealing survey. *First*, more than half of the respondents (50.4%) expressed their disagreement of the decision. The survey specified that most of the disappointed respondents were voters of the President's Democrat Party, the Golkar Party, the Prosperous and Justice Party, the National Awakening Party and the National Mandate Party. Not surprisingly, the disagreement level of Moslem respondents was higher than non-Moslems. *Second*, looking at their preferences, 33.2% of the respondents preferred the government to vote against Resolution 1747, while 26.7% favoured the decision to abstain. *Third*, concerning the country's diplomacy, 62.6% of the respondents expressed their scepticism that the government had been able to put Indonesia onto an equal footing with major powers. *Fourth*, the majority of the respondents (73.2%) assumed that the decision to support Resolution 1747 was not without international pressures but 63.2% acknowledged the dilemma of the Indonesian government if it opposed the interest of the great powers—most notably the United States.<sup>28</sup>

On the part of *interest groups*, some leaders of religious mass organizations voiced their disagreement with the government's decision. Hasyim Muzadi, a prominent cleric of Nahdlatul Ulama—the largest Moslem organization in Indonesia, repeatedly expressed his disappointment. According to him, by supporting the Resolution 1747, the Indonesian government neglected the aspirations of its Moslem population who opposed Western intimidation of Iran.<sup>29</sup> A similar view was also echoed by religious leaders of the second largest Moslem organization. Din Syamsuddin, the General Chairman of Muhammadiyah, accused the government of succumbing to the schemes

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<sup>28</sup> See Toto Supyaningtyas, "Tersedak Dalam Jebakan Resolusi PBB," *Kompas* (2 April 2007).

<sup>29</sup> See "Usulan Perubahan RI Diterima," *Kompas* (27 March 2007).

of Western countries to secure the interests of their key ally in the Middle East—Israel.<sup>30</sup> Other social-political leaders also accused the government of caving in to American pressure, particularly in bilateral talks between President Yudhoyono and President George W. Bush in Bogor a couple of months beforehand.<sup>31</sup>

Taken as a whole, the sharp criticisms from interest groups and public at large were essentially prompted by the entanglement between Iran's nuclear issue, religious sensitivity and public sentiment in Indonesia toward Western countries. Consequently, Indonesia's support for Resolution 1747 was an unpopular foreign policy decision for the majority of Moslem constituents, who might withdraw their political support for the government. Thus, public antagonism to the government's foreign policy was a potent issue for politicization by partisan groups either to reduce the credibility of President Yudhoyono's administration or simply trim down his popularity and electability in the upcoming national elections.<sup>32</sup>

### **Indonesia's Party Politics and the Parliament's "Iran Interpellation"**

The growing anger of Moslem organizations and the public at large was quickly grasped by a majority of political parties—as the *partisan group* in Indonesian domestic politics.<sup>33</sup> At different occasions, Yuddy Chrisnandi and Sidharto Danusubroto, who were respectively legislative members of the Golkar Party and the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDI-P), argued that the UNSC's suspicions on the military nature of Iran's uranium enrichment activities were a "premature" conclusion without adequate evidence. Accordingly, they urged the Indonesian government to consistently support the Iranian nuclear programme for peaceful purposes.<sup>34</sup> Even more critical, some members of parliament from different

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<sup>30</sup> See "RI Says Iran Resolution Prioritizes Peaceful Options," *Jakarta Post* (27 March 2007).

<sup>31</sup> See Elly Burhaini Faizal "Indonesia Tidak Konsisten Soal Nuklir Iran," *Suara Pembaruan* (1 April 2007).

<sup>32</sup> See "Indonesia is Experiencing An Identity Crisis," *Jakarta Post* (5 April 2007); "Politikasi Interpelasi," *Media Indonesia* (22 May 2007).

<sup>33</sup> See "Anger Grows Over Iran Resolution," *Jakarta Post* (30 March 2007).

<sup>34</sup> See "Setuju Indonesia Dukung Resolusi PBB," *Tempo* (9-15 April 2007).

parties claimed the government's support for Resolution 1747 was against the spirit of Indonesia's Constitution, and endangered the legitimacy of President Yudhoyono.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, several political analysts observed that the strong opposition of party elites to the approval of the UNSC resolution were inseparable from the dynamics of domestic politics following the second reshuffle of cabinet members.<sup>36</sup> It is worth noting that President Yudhoyono's first term (2004-2009) was politically supported by a coalition of the Democrat Party and the Golkar Party along with the United Development Party (PPP), the National Mandate Party (PAN), the National Awakening Party (PKB), the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and the Crescent Star Party (PBB). According to the votes they earned in the 2004 election, the coalition controlled 414 seats (75%) of a total of 550 seats in the House of Representative (see Graphic 1).<sup>37</sup> In return for their political support in the parliament, President Yudhoyono granted political concessions to each party, including ministerial positions in his administration (see Graphic 2). Understandably, the second reshuffle of cabinet members had dissatisfied some political parties of the government's coalition, most notably Golkar.

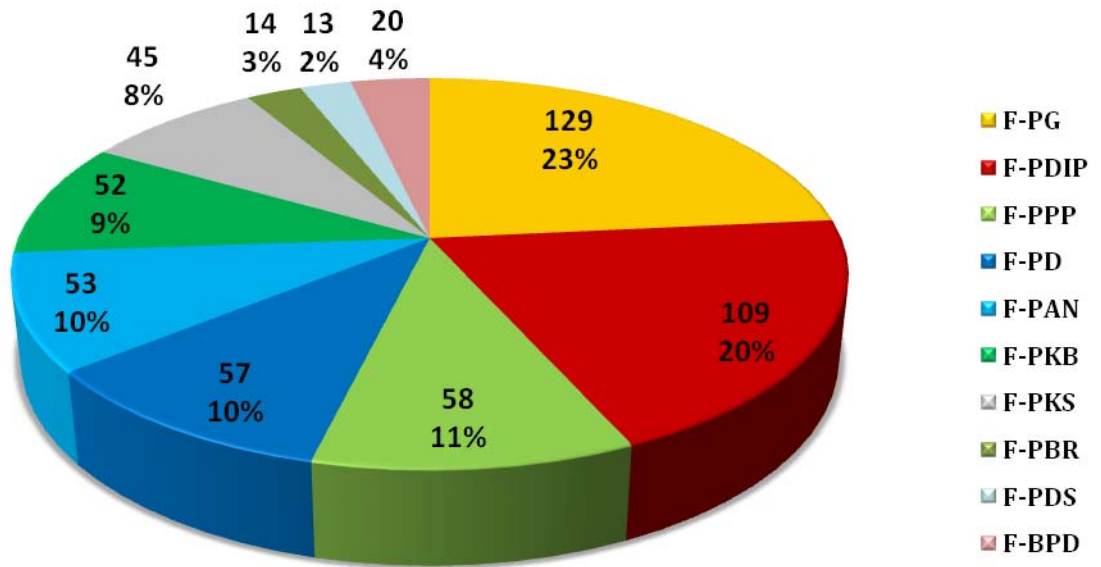
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<sup>35</sup> See Dedy Djameluddin Malik, "Politik Tidak Bebas Tapi Aktif," *Tempo* (2-8 April 2007); "Usulan Perubahan RI Diterima," *Kompas* (27 March 2007).

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Yudi Latif, "Interpelasi di Tengah Erosi Kepercayaan," *Media Indonesia* (7 June 2007); Eep Saefulloh Fatah, "Interpelasi dan Oposisi Musiman," *Tempo* (25 June-1 July 2007).

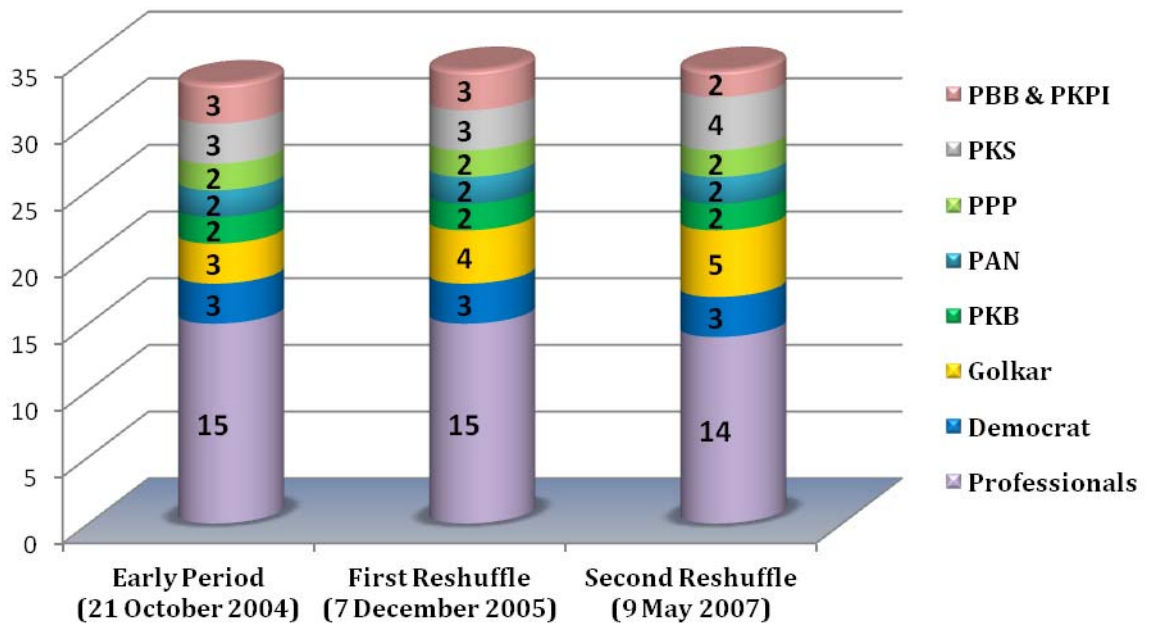
<sup>37</sup> For 2004-2009 period, there were 10 party caucuses (*fraksi*) in Indonesian parliament, namely: (i) the Golkar Party caucus (F-PG), (ii) the Indonesia Democratic Party for Struggle caucus (F-PDIP), (iii) the United Development Party caucus (F-PPP), (iv) the Democratic Party caucus (F-PD), (v) the National Mandate Party caucus (F-PAN), (vi) the National Awakening Party caucus (F-PKB), (vii) the Prosperous Justice Party caucus (F-PKS), (viii) the Reform Star Party caucus (F-PBR), (ix) the Prosperous Justice Party caucus (F-PDS), and (x) the Democratic Star Vanguard caucus (F-BPD).

**Graphic 1**  
**Party Caucuses in the Indonesian Parliament, 2004-2009**



Source: DPR-RI, *Laporan Lima Tahun DPR RI 2004-2009: Mengemban Amanat dan Aspirasi Rakyat* (Jakarta: Sekretariat Jenderal DPR RI, Oktober 2009), p. 9.

**Graphic 2**  
**President Yudhoyono's Cabinet Formation, 2004-2009**



Source: Author's personal dataset compiled from a number of publications.

As the largest party in the parliament and the biggest ally of the government, the Golkar Party had demanded more of its members be represented in the cabinet. Yet President Yudhoyono granted only one additional ministerial position to Golkar. Also instead of receiving the coveted office of Minister for State-Owned Enterprises, Golkar was given the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, which had less strategic and economic gains for political purposes.<sup>38</sup> The reshuffle disenchanted many elites within the party—considering the significant support they had given without equitable political returns.

Following the May 2007 reshuffle, a number of political manoeuvres emerged which clearly demonstrated a “rift” in the “Cikeas-Slipi” coalition.<sup>39</sup> *Firstly*, there was a meeting between several political elites of the Golkar Party and the Indonesia Democratic Party for Struggle. The latter was the second largest party and the government’s biggest opposition in the parliament. At this meeting, the two parties canvassed a “coalition in spirit” (*koalisi batin*) for the upcoming 2009 elections.<sup>40</sup> *Secondly*, Golkar’s legislative members began openly criticising the government’s handling of Resolution 1747.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, other parties in the coalition had begun to showcase critical attitudes toward the President, while maintaining their presence in the cabinet.<sup>42</sup>

Through the mechanism of party caucuses (*fraksi*) in the parliament, parties’ control over their respective legislative members is a very effective political instrument to exert pressure on President Yudhoyono. Soon after the adoption of Resolution 1747, the parliament’s Commission I overseeing foreign affairs convened a hearing with Indonesia’s foreign minister, Hassan Wirajuda. The commission deemed his explanations inadequate.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, several members of parliament proposed to

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<sup>38</sup> See Syamsuddin Haris, “Golkar dan ‘Reshuffle’ Kabinet,” *Kompas* (17 April 2007).

<sup>39</sup> Some Indonesia’s political observers terms President Yudhoyono’s alliance with the Golkar Party as the “Cikeas-Slipi” coalition. The former refers to the President’s private residence in Bogor, while the latter is the Party’s headquarters in Jakarta.

<sup>40</sup> See “Baru Sebatas Koalisi Batin,” *Tempo* (25 June-1 July 2007).

<sup>41</sup> See Benget Silitonga, “Membaca Konflik Parlemen Vs Presiden,” *Media Indonesia* (11 June 2007).

<sup>42</sup> See “Dukungan Partai Pada Presiden Semakin Lemah,” *Media Indonesia* (29 May 2007); “Presiden dan DPR Berlawanan,” *Media Indonesia* (28 June 2007).

<sup>43</sup> See “Laporan Singkat Rapat Kerja Komisi I DPR RI dengan Menteri Luar Negeri” (29 March 2007); “Komisi I DPR Kecewa,” *Kompas* (1 April 2007).



exercise the legislature's right of interpellation and persuaded their colleagues to support the initiative.<sup>44</sup> The sponsors of the interpellation initiative were Yuddy Chrisnandi (Golkar Party), Abdilah Toha (PAN), Ali Mochtar Ngabalin (PBB), Effendi Choiries (PKB) and Sidarto Danusubroto (PDI-P).

Later in the Plenary Assembly on 15 May 2007, a majority of party caucuses agreed to back the interpellation initiative by inquiring into the government's approval of Resolution 1747—known as the “Iran interpellation.”<sup>45</sup> According to the Indonesian parliamentary handbook, the exercise of interpellation has to be endorsed by at least 13 members of parliament.<sup>46</sup> Surprisingly, one half of the legislature's members signed up to support the initiative (see Graphic 3). For its proponents, the Iran interpellation to summon President Yudhoyono for his administration's conduct was a popular political manoeuvre to gain sympathy and support from Indonesian people, in particular Moslem constituents.<sup>47</sup>

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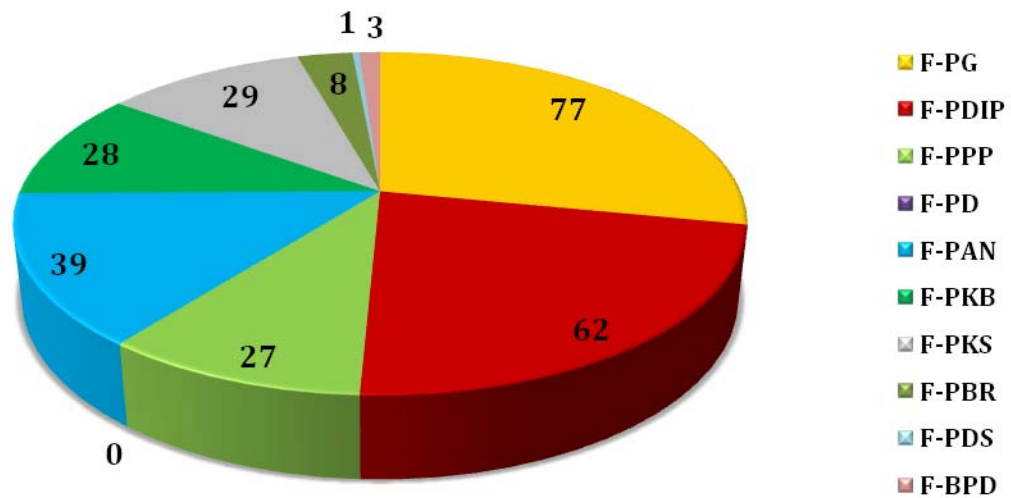
<sup>44</sup> See “Interpelasi Resolusi 1747 Bergulir Cepat,” *Kompas* (28 March 2007).

<sup>45</sup> Based on lobbies among the leaders of party caucuses during the recess time, Iran interpellation was eventually supported by seven parties—including the Golkar Party. While the Democrat Party and the Prosperous Peace Party opposed the initiative, the Reform Star Party abstained in the voting session. See “Paripurna DPR Terima Usulan Interpelasi DPR,” *Kompas* (10 May 2007).

<sup>46</sup> See Article 171 in the Handbook of Indonesia's House of Representatives (DPR-RI) Year 2005.

<sup>47</sup> See M. Alfian Alfian, “Bola Liar Interpelasi,” *Kompas* (11 April 2007).

**Graphic 3**  
**Indonesia's Legislator Proponents of**  
**"Iran Interpellation"**



Source: Hosianna Rugun Anggreni Rajagukguk, *Sikap Kritis Parlemen terhadap Kebijakan Luar Negeri Indonesia dalam Kasus Resolusi DK-PBB tentang Isu Nuklir Iran*, unpublished undergraduate thesis (Jakarta: University of Indonesia, 2009), p. 5.

Shortly after, the Iran interpellation turned into a political standoff between the Indonesian parliament and the government. While a majority of legislative members demanded that President Yudhoyono himself appear to explain his administration's policies, the President refused to accede to the demand.<sup>48</sup> When the Plenary Assembly took place on 5 June 2007, President Yudhoyono assigned six ministers and a senior official to explain the decision on his behalf.<sup>49</sup> Due to frequent interruptions and passionate outbursts by legislative members in committee, the chairman of the Indonesian parliament eventually decided to adjourn the session and re-schedule the

<sup>48</sup> See "Presiden Perlu Datang ke DPR," *Kompas* (18 May 2007); "Presiden Harus Hadir di DPR," *Media Indonesia* (22 May 2007); "Presiden Wajib Hadiri Rapat Paripurna DPR," *Media Indonesia* (23 May 2007); "Ketua DPR Minta Presiden Hadiri Sidang," *Media Indonesia* (24 May 2007); "House Calls President Over Iran Resolution," *Jakarta Post* (25 May 2007); "Ketua DPR Surati Presiden Hadiri Paripurna," *Kompas* (26 May 2007); "President Urged to Show at Iran Plenary Session," *Jakarta Post* (26 May 2007).

<sup>49</sup> The six ministers and a senior official were the Coordinating Minister for Political, Law and Security Affairs, the Coordinating Minister of Social Welfare, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Social Affairs, the Minister of State Secretariat, and the Head of State Intelligence Agency. See "Presiden tugasi widodo," *Kompas* (4 June 2007); "Widodo AS Akan Wakili Presiden," *Kompas* (4 June 2007).

Plenary Assembly in order to persuade the President to attend.<sup>50</sup> In turn, President Yudhoyono's absence further disillusioned members of the legislature—particularly the sponsors of the “Iran interpellation”, who began to accuse the President of disrespecting the parliament.<sup>51</sup>

This open breach between parties ostensibly in government together presented a clear sign of disunity in the ranks of the coalition. Also, unlike previous interpellation initiatives, the President's absence from a parliamentary summons had never before caused such uproar.<sup>52</sup> Patently, the passion of the political landscape had raised a notch.

### **The Impetus of Domestic Political Stability and Indonesia's Abstention from Resolution 1803**

Antagonism towards the Indonesian government's support of Resolution 1747 to some extent indicated the chink in the armour of President Yudhoyono's popularity.<sup>53</sup> Amidst political competition for the upcoming 2009 elections, an incumbent candidate's policies would attract closer scrutiny than otherwise might be the case. Referring to a national survey conducted by the Indonesia Survey Institution (LSI) in mid-2007, the degree of public satisfaction towards President Yudhoyono tended to decline during the first three years of his first term. Although it was still above 50 percent, the number had decreased from 80 percent in November 2004 to 54 percent in October 2007 (see Graphic 4). There was also a drop in support for President Yudhoyono's re-election, which dipped from 37 percent in October 2006 to 33

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<sup>50</sup> See “DPR Tolak Utusan Presiden,” *Media Indonesia* (6 June 2007); “SBY No-Show Delays House Iran Hearing,” *Jakarta Post* (6 June 2007); “Bamus Jadwalkan Paripurna Interpelasi,” *Kompas* (14 June 2007).

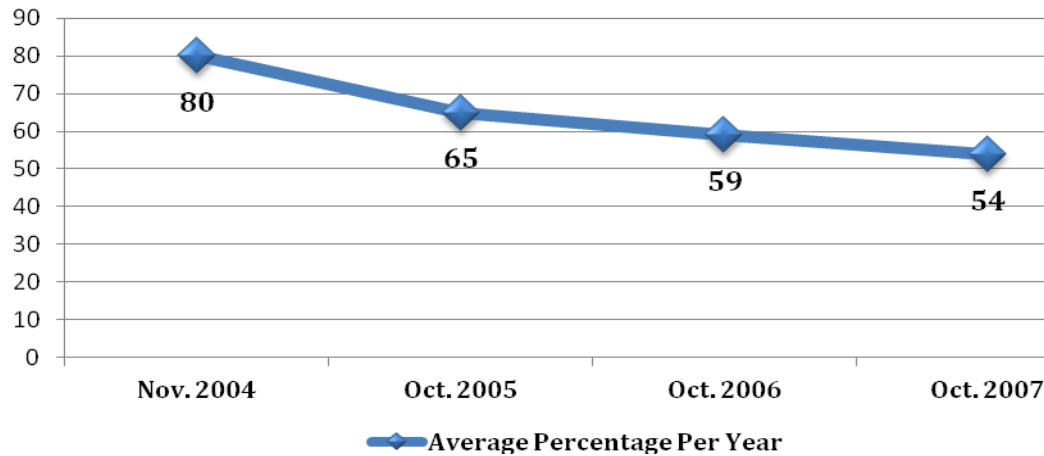
<sup>51</sup> See “SBY Opts to Skip House Session, Lawmakers Irritated,” *Jakarta Post* (5 June 2007); “Sebagian Anggota DPR Kecewa,” *Kompas* (6 June 2007).

<sup>52</sup> See Hosianna Rugun Anggreni Rajagukguk, *Sikap Kritis Parlemen terhadap Kebijakan Luar Negeri Indonesia dalam Kasus Resolusi DK-PBB tentang Isu Nuklir Iran, Skripsi Strata-1, Universitas Indonesia*, 2009, pp. 5, 88.

<sup>53</sup> See M. Alfian, “Interpelasi, Uji Nyali Politik Pemerintah,” *Media Indonesia* (25 June 2007).

percent in October 2007 (see Graphic 5). Even so, the President's electability level remained stronger compared to other political figures.<sup>54</sup>

**Graphic 4**  
**The Degree of Public Satisfaction upon**  
**President Yudhoyono's Administration**

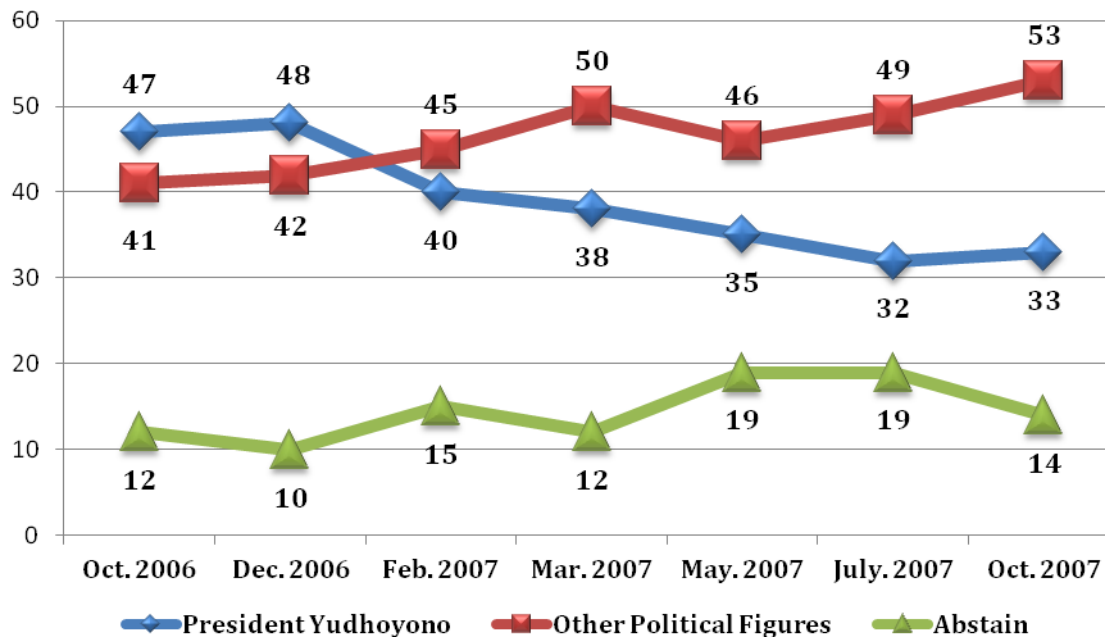


Source: Indonesia Survey Institute, "Prospek Kepemimpinan Nasional: Evaluasi Publik Tiga Tahun Presiden," National Survey November 2004-October 2007, Jakarta: October 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Besides President Yudhoyono, there were ten national figures included in the LSI's poll. They were Megawati Soekarnoputri, Jusuf Kalla, Wiranto, Amien Rais, Hidayat Nur Wahid, Sutiyoso and Sultan Hamengkubuwono X.

**Graphic 5**

**The Percentage of Electoral Sentiment to President Yudhoyono and Other Political Figures**



Source: Indonesia Survey Institute, “Prospek Kepemimpinan Nasional: Evaluasi Publik Tiga Tahun Presiden,” National Survey November 2004-October 2007, Jakarta: October 2007.

More importantly, maintaining solid support from the proponent parties was a pre-eminent condition for the survival of a government founded upon a political coalition. According to that wisdom, political turbulence surrounding Indonesian parliament’s “Iran interpellation” had to be ended immediately; otherwise, they would further intensify the public’s criticism and political opposition that tarnished the credibility of President Yudhoyono’s administration in the long run.<sup>55</sup> Even before the “Iran interpellation” was approved, the government had attempted to persuade the leaders of party caucuses at a meeting in Hotel Dharmawangsa.<sup>56</sup>

Following the failure of the Plenary Assembly, the political stalemate between legislative and executive was also mitigated through a number of alternatives. The

<sup>55</sup> See M. Alfian Alfian, “Interpelasi, Uji Nyali Politik Pemerintah,” *Media Indonesia* (25 June 2007).

<sup>56</sup> The meeting on 27 March 2007 was attended by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hassan Wirajuda and the Coordinating Minister on Social Welfare, Aburizal Bakrie, as well as several leaders of party caucuses. Aburizal, who was also one of the leaders of the Golkar Party, was reported to have personal meeting with Yuddy Chrisnandi. See “Interpelasi, Ayo maju, maju,” *Tempo* (25 June-1 July 2007).

*first* option was requesting the President to deliver a speech regarding the government approval of Resolution 1747 without dialogue session—relevant questions from legislative members to be addressed in a separate meeting with the ministers. The *second* alternative was to delegate President Yudhoyono's attendance to the Vice President Jusuf Kalla. Apparently, this alternative was an ideal option for the Golkar Party, who sought to boost the popularity of Vice President Jusuf Kalla for his political interest as the party's chairman in the upcoming 2009 election.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, the *third* alternative was to hold a consultative meeting between the key leaders in Indonesian parliament and the government.<sup>58</sup>

Eventually, President Yudhoyono opted for the third alternative to facilitate political communication between the executive and the legislative bodies.<sup>59</sup> In a meeting on 3 July 2007, both parties reached a mutual agreement on several outstanding issues. *Firstly*, a majority of party caucuses decided not to dispute the President's absence in the Plenary Assembly concerning the "Iran interpellation".<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, the Consultative Body (*Badan Musyawarah*) of Indonesian parliament re-scheduled the assembly to take place on 10 July 2007 that ran smoothly in spite of some interruptions from legislative members.<sup>61</sup> *Secondly*, the government agreed to consult intensively with the parliament before making a decision on international agreement or foreign policies, particularly on sensitive issues with wide impact on Indonesian people.<sup>62</sup> This second point clearly showed that while Indonesia's foreign policy decision making fell within the domain of the executive, the legislative, in the post-

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<sup>57</sup> See "Kalla Tunggu Perintah SBY untuk Jawab Interpelasi," *Media Indonesia* (16 June 2008); "DPR Hanya Mau Selamatkan Muka," *Media Indonesia* (18 June 2007).

<sup>58</sup> See "SBY, House Leadership to Meet on Iran Issue," *Jakarta Post* (15 June 2007); "Presiden Diminta Datang ke DPR," *Media Indonesia* (20 June 2007); "Tuntaskan Interpelasi," *Kompas* (20 June 2007); "SBY Agrees to Limited House Session," *Jakarta Post* (22 June 2007); "Presiden Bersedia Datang ke DPR," *Media Indonesia* (22 June 2007); "Jalan Keluarnya Presiden Akan Menjelaskan di DPR," *Kompas* (23 June 2007).

<sup>59</sup> See "Presiden Penuhi Undangan DPR," *Kompas* (3 July 2007); "Rapat Konsultasi Tidak Reduksi Interpelasi," *Media Indonesia* (3 July 2007).

<sup>60</sup> See Syamsuddin Haris, "Politik Konsultasi Presiden-DPR," *Kompas* (5 July 2007); "Fraksi Tak Akan Paksa Kehadiran Presiden," *Kompas* (5 July 2007); "Bamus DPR Tidak Wajibkan Presiden Hadir," *Media Indonesia* (6 July 2007).

<sup>61</sup> See "House Schedules Plenary Sessions for SBY on Iran, Mudflow," *Jakarta Post* (6 July 2007); "DPR Undang Kembali Presiden," *Kompas* (6 July 2007).

<sup>62</sup> See "Pertemuan Presiden DPR Alot," *Kompas* (4 July 2007); "Konsultasi SBY-DPR Tidak Terkait Interpelasi," *Media Indonesia* (4 July 2007); "Usai Konsultasi, Fraksi di DPR Melunak," *Suara Karya* (5 July 2007).

New Order era, could play an influential role to cajole or criticize the former's decision on certain international issues.

The impetus of domestic political stability was even more obvious in the shift of Indonesia's response to the development of Iran's nuclear issue. On 3 March 2008, the UNSC instituted Resolution 1803 imposing additional sanctions against Iran, including (i) travel ban on officials related to Iran's nuclear programme and freezing the government's overseas assets, (ii) commercial prohibition of commodities with potential military purposes, (iii) overseeing financial transactions of two banks that were allegedly related to Iran's nuclear programme and inspection of suspicious ships with restricted materials going to and from Iran.<sup>63</sup> Sponsored by France and the United Kingdom, the resolution was adopted after 14 permanent and non-permanent members of the UNSC cast their approval.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike its earlier decision, Indonesian government preferred to abstain in the vote for the adoption of Resolution 1803. Indonesia's Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda clarified that the decision was based on the IAEA's report in February 2008. The report revealed that Iranian government had been willing to make its nuclear programme transparent, and undertaken necessary measures according to Resolution 1737 and 1747.<sup>65</sup> Regardless of several matters that required IAEA's verification—particularly the green salt project for uranium enrichment, high explosive testing, and missile warhead design, Indonesian government contended that further sanctions on Iran were unnecessary.<sup>66</sup>

At domestic level, the government's decision to abstain has gained widespread public approval from social groups and political parties. Based on an unpublished poll conducted by a private organization, more than half of the respondents agreed with the government's decision in the UNSC (see Graphic 6). Should it take a decision that was against mainstream views, the government would have had to deal with a more

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<sup>63</sup> See "Resolution 1803," adopted by the United Nations Security Council at 5848th meeting on 3 March 2008.

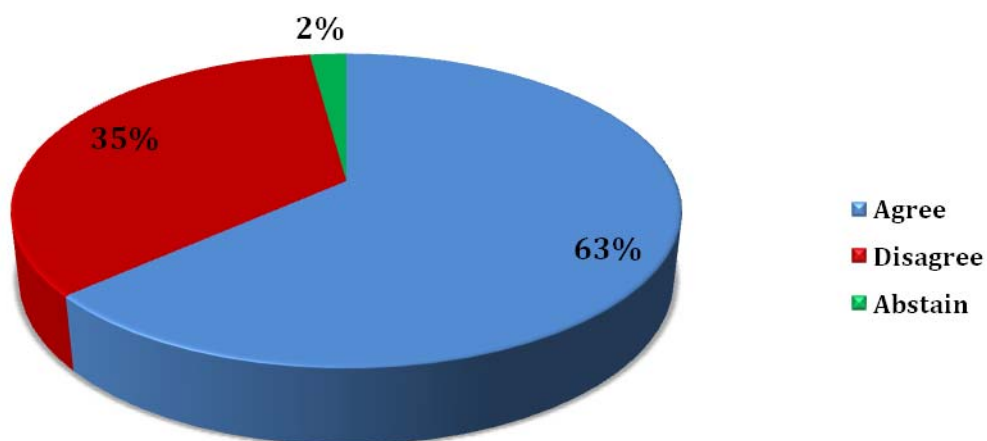
<sup>64</sup> See "Indonesia Abstains in UN Vote on Iran," *Jakarta Post* (5 March 2008).

<sup>65</sup> See "Hassan Wirajuda: Keluar dari Lingkaran Setan," *Gatra* (8-12 March 2008).

<sup>66</sup> See Hassan Wirajuda, "Soal Nuklir Iran," *Kompas* (1 March 2008).

severe domestic political backlash than before, thereby jeopardizing the popularity of President Yudhoyono and his chances for re-election in 2009.

**Graphic 6**  
**Public Perception to the Indonesian Government's Abstention upon the Resolution 1803**



Source: Author's personal courtesy.

Looking at the reciprocal impact of domestic politics upon Indonesian foreign policy, the government's abstention in the voting for Resolution 1803 was a neutral decision. Yudhoyono government apparently succeeded in walking a tight rope by balancing its interest of not antagonising the great powers and domestic public. Even before that, in order to cool down political tension with legislative members over "Iran Interpellation", the Indonesian government had resisted approving a UNSC's non-binding resolution condemning Iranian President Ahmadinejad's call for the annihilation of Israel.<sup>67</sup> Later on January 2009—five months before national elections, Indonesia again abstained in an emergency session of the United Nations' General Assembly on a draft resolution that was less tough to denounce the Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip.<sup>68</sup> The shift in Indonesia's response to Iran's nuclear programme—from

<sup>67</sup> See "RI Blocks UN Statement on Iran," *Jakarta Post* (11 June 2007); "Ahmadinejad Berterima Kasih Kepada Indonesia," *Kompas* (23 June 2007). Previously, in the late March 2007, Indonesian government rejected the adoption of UNSC resolution to condemn Iran's capture of 15 British sailors. See "Iran Thanks RI for Help at UN," *Jakarta Post* (2 April 2007).

<sup>68</sup> See "Indonesia Abstain, Resolusi Terlalu Lunak," *Kompas* (18 January 2009).



approving Resolution 1747 to abstention of Resolution 1803—was obviously a popular decision to avoid criticism from domestic constituents.

### **Concluding Remarks and a Lesson Learnt for Indonesia's Future Diplomacy**

In response to the earlier set of questions, the paper has reached two conclusions. *Firstly*, the executive remains in the driving seat to set the pace of Indonesia's foreign policy. Yet, domestic political forces outside the government's decision-making structure have gained new powers to influence the government into reversing or softening an established policy. In Indonesia today, partisan organisations, interest groups and the mass organisations are prepared to subordinate consideration of the executive-formed international policy in order to pursue their respective ideological objectives and political ambitions against the government. Under the current democratic climate, these actors have constrained the Indonesian government's freedom of initiative in foreign policy realm and brought it back to a trajectory more in line with community expectations.

*Secondly*, as this case study demonstrates, domestic political forces are likely to come into play in Indonesia's foreign policy formulation if the policy issue affects their ideological perceptions and political interests. The interplay between religious sympathy for Iran and deep grudge surrounding the cabinet reshuffle apparently prompted the majority of the Moslem population, religious mass organizations and political parties to exert their pressures on Indonesian government's response to Iranian nuclear issue in the UNSC. The growing domestic antipathy eventually culminated in the Indonesian parliament summoning the President to a hearing on the government's policy towards Resolution 1747.

Amidst the rising opposition on the Iran nuclear issue, President Yudhoyono was placed in a difficult position. He could hardly ignore the pressures given that his government was founded upon a multi-party coalition. Moreover, the parliament had placed him in a difficult predicament, stranded on an unpopular policy that incensed a majority of the population. Therefore, ignoring negative sentiments surrounding the parliament's "Iran interpellation" would have only brought more harm than good both

to domestic political stability and to President Yudhyono's leadership, particularly in critical times prior to the 2009 national and presidential election.

In the following vote in the UNSC, Indonesia elected to abstain from supporting Resolution 1803 that imposed additional sanctions against Iran. In short, choosing to abstain from voting on the resolution was a popular decision that helped to avoid a domestic showdown; which also regained credibility for the government among the Indonesian people prior to the 2009 election. This draws attention to the fact that the executive still drives the country's foreign policy and is able to make decisions that can impact upon domestic politics, thereby strengthening the positions of those who advocate linkage politics. This tended to satisfy the Indonesian public while the political uproar shifted to other big issues. In so far as their pressures were concerned, the parliament and social-political forces were only able to make corrections of the government's policy stance, but ultimately lost their interest once the issue was no longer relevant for their domestic agenda.

In sum, this case study shows that Indonesia's foreign policy is now vulnerable to politicization and public pressures. However, the government still seems to have a "free hand" to decide on the country's foreign policy so long as it attracts insignificant attention from the people and parliament. With regard to UNSC Resolution 1747, Indonesia's experience in dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue highlighted two important lessons for the future. *First*, it illustrates the limits that should not be overlooked in Indonesia's foreign policy affairs, particularly on sensitive international issues with broad impact upon domestic constituents. *Second*, it demonstrates the risks of taking a foreign policy decision against mainstream domestic aspirations. Meanwhile, abstaining in the voting for Resolution 1803 was seen as a neutral decision from both the international and the domestic perspective.

Nevertheless, such inconsistency may to some extent affect Indonesia's international image. Indonesia is among those countries which favour reforming the UNSC, including expanding the number of permanent members. Any country aiming at permanent membership of the UNSC—possibly including Indonesia—should be aware of the huge responsibilities that international security confers on responsible policy making at the national level. The relevant question for future research is: "to what extent is the Indonesian government prepared to hold international

responsibilities, should the country one day become a permanent member of the UNSC?" If the Iran voting affair is indicative of a precedent, then the answer does not look promising.

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