

# The First Directly-Elected Indonesian President

By Shiraishi Takashi

**INDONESIA'S** sixth and newest president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, is a former military officer who, together with General Wiranto, led the Indonesian military during the period of transition from Suharto's dictatorship to the current democratic regime. He was instrumental in calling for reforms aimed at dismantling the military's socio-political function, which had long been used to justify the military's central role in supporting the authoritarian government. He then served as Minister for Mines and Energy and the Coordinating Minister for Security and Political Affairs under President Abdurrahman Wahid and once again as the Coordinating Minister for Political Affairs under former President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Installed last October, Yudhoyono – or SBY as he is known in Indonesia – is the first president to be elected directly by the Indonesian people. By all accounts, he is a good listener, very patient, cautious and hands-on as far as management is concerned.

But he is also, in many ways, the first post-Suharto president. In the six years since Suharto stepped down, three people have served as presidents before Yudhoyono – B. J. Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid and Megawati Sukarnoputri. But these three people largely defined themselves in relation – and often opposition – to Suharto.

Yudhoyono represents a new type of Indonesian political leader. He is one of the first politicians to understand the importance of the public in the democratic process. He took public opinion surveys seriously in his bid for the presidency, and he now wants to create an American-style presidency supported by staff who include one of the leading public-opinion experts. He is, in other words, the first post-Suharto president



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Indonesia's new president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono

precisely because he is the first one who listens to the people.

There is a joke circulating about the presidents after Suharto that captures the gist of people's perceptions of their leaders: Habibie never listened, Wahid could hardly see and Megawati simply could not speak. Yudhoyono stands out in his speeches because he regularly employs the first-person pronoun "I" when explaining himself to the public. This signifies a style of direct address in which the president makes himself accountable and takes responsibility for what he says.

How did Yudhoyono gain the trust of the Indonesian people?

The Indonesian people were deeply disappointed with Megawati and disillusioned with her failure to live up to her promises of reform. Therefore they clamored for change. Although it is true that Megawati's government succeeded in stabilizing the economy, it failed to achieve enough economic growth to create jobs for the nearly 2.5 million people

entering the labor market every year. Her administration was marked by widespread corruption, and military reform got stalled. The conflict in Aceh province took a turn for the worse when Megawati imposed martial law and adopted a military approach to "solve" the situation in the province.

In the presidential campaign, Yudhoyono called for change, and projected himself as a man of will and leadership. He rightly identified that the economic question is the fundamental issue that Indonesia now faces. His victory shows how much Indonesians actually hope for a better future.

There is no question that democracy is alive and well in Indonesia. Parliamentary elections held last April as well as the two rounds of presidential elections in July and September 2004 were held peacefully, fairly and freely.

But democratization has changed Indonesian politics in a fundamental way. Along with the presidency and the military, the parliament with political parties has now emerged as a power center. Therefore, Yudhoyono has to negotiate both with the parliament and political parties as well as the military to advance his policy agenda, including making economic policy to overcome the economic crisis, reforming the judicial system, fighting corruption, addressing problems of law and order, and the issue of territorial integrity (above all, dealing with the situations in Aceh and Papua).

The parliament, however, is divided equally between the pro-government and the opposition coalitions. It is well known that Megawati refused to attend the inauguration ceremony and has rebuffed Yudhoyono's repeated attempts for conversation. She strongly believes that she can make a comeback in a year or two if Yudhoyono were impeached and ousted. She is counting on the opposition coalition led by her party the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) and Golkar to restore her to the presidency.

As a result, the pro-government coalition is cobbled together mainly from Megawati's former vice president

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Hamzah Haz's Development Unity Party (PPP), former president Wahid's National Awakening Party (PKB), presidential candidate Amien Rais' National Mandate Party (PAN), the Welfare and Justice Party (PKS), and the Crescent and Star Party (PBB), together with Yudhoyono's own newly established Democratic Party (PD). Except for the Democratic Party, all of the above are known to be Islamic parties whose main constituencies are pious Muslims, and whose leaders include not a few consummate opportunists (Haz of PPP) and rabid Islamists (Yusril Ihza Mahendra of PBB). This means that Islamic parties have disproportionate influence in the pro-government coalition and are likely to use the coalition to push for their agenda.

The political clout of the Islamic parties is evident in Yudhoyono's appointed cabinet, which was announced on the day of the president's inauguration.

Even though Yudhoyono himself understood the importance of appointing technocrats with international credibility to the cabinet, he ended up making concessions to Islamist parties, above all the PKS and the PBB. One example is University of Indonesia Faculty of Economics professor and former IMF board member Sri Mulyani, who was initially slated for the Minister of Finance post but whose appointment was blocked by the "anti-IMF" Islamists and ended up being appointed the Head of the National Planning Agency (Bapenas) instead.

The composition of the cabinet also reflects the delicate question of the division of labor between the president and vice-president, Jusuf Kalla. As a product of the long-term economic development under Suharto, Kalla built his empire as a leading *pribumi* (native Indonesian) businessman and served as a Golkar politician. Allied with Aburizal Bakrie, who is now Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, and Ginandjar Kartasasmita, chairman of the regional representation council (DPD) and Golkar Kingpin, Kalla has a strong voice in the current government.

The newly formed cabinet is thus



The members of Indonesia's new Cabinet

clearly a product of delicate political negotiations and compromises.

An overview of the cabinet composition indicates that ministers in politics and security (such as Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Admiral Widodo, Minister of Defense Juwono Sudarsono, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hasan Wirayuda) are mainly Yudhoyono's people while those handling the economic portfolios (such as Minister of Finance Jusuf Anwar, Minister of Trade Mari E. Pangestu, and Head of the National Planning Agency, Sri Mulyani) are technocrats, but mixed in with Kalla's people (Aburizal Bakrie). Political parties in the governing coalition were given ministerial posts in other fields such as religious affairs, education, and welfare.

Yudhoyono made it clear in his inaugural address that Indonesians should not expect any easy and rapid solution to the country's pressing problems. Nevertheless he needs to demonstrate his will, ability, leadership and commitment to address the pressing problems of a sluggish economy, rampant corruption, Aceh and Papua and Islamicist groups such as Jamaah Islamiyah.

One thing that bears watching is how the government will address the economic question. The government must decide whether to improve the invest-

ment climate for medium and long-term economic growth, or else create jobs by relying on government-funded public works. The second option may prove unsustainable in the long run.

Another thing to watch is whether the president and his attorney general have the will to tackle big corruption cases and bring the guilty parties to justice. The biggest challenge is that of cleaning up the judicial system, including the attorney general's office and the Supreme Court. Yudhoyono's attorney general, Abdul Rahman Saleh, is a respected lawyer who is best known for casting the dissenting vote against the acquittal of the Golkar chair man Akbar Tandjung.

Finally, it remains to be seen whether Yudhoyono will employ a political rather than military approach to resolve the conflict in Aceh and Papua. In this connection, it is also important to see how he goes about military reform – the foremost of which is the creation of a sound financial base for the military that will help restore military discipline among rank and file soldiers – which had stalled under Megawati. **JS**

Shiraishi Takashi is a professor at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. He specializes in Asian studies and international relations.