

Indonesia maintains suspended relations with Australia as spying allegations widen

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Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono last night delayed any resumption of military, police and intelligence cooperation with Australia, while holding out the prospect of restored relations if a formal code of conduct, including intelligence-sharing, is signed between the two neighbours.

Yudhoyono's move came amid sharply rising strategic tensions across the region, triggered by the aggressive US "pivot" to Asia that is directed against China, and further evidence of extensive US-Australian spying operations throughout the region.

After a top-level ministerial meeting yesterday, the Indonesian president made two closely connected announcements. The first was that the week-long standoff with Australia over leaked US documents—showing that the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) monitored phone calls made by Yudhoyono, his wife and inner circle in 2009—would continue until Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott signed a detailed protocol on bilateral relations. Yudhoyono's second announcement was to call in the ambassadors of Singapore and South Korea to explain further leaked US documents that showed the two countries were directly involved in the US and Australian electronic surveillance network operating in Indonesia and throughout Asia.

Like the revelations of Australian phone-tapping against Yudhoyono and his associates, the latest documents came from US National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden. Published in Australia's Fairfax Media on Monday, a top-secret NSA map detailed the role of Singapore's spy agency in tapping Internet traffic moving through the city-state, which includes most of Indonesia's telecommunications, as well as Malaysia's.

According to the documents, South Korea was

involved in a similar US-led operation against China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, as part of a global web designed to enable Washington and its "Five Eyes" partners—the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand—to trace "anyone, anywhere, anytime."

Like Indonesia, the Malaysian government summoned Singapore's ambassador to explain the revelations. This is another sign of the intensifying fallout from Snowden's exposures of the vast US-orchestrated global surveillance network. Both Malaysia and Indonesia are critical to the Obama administration's preparations for war against China, which include cutting off key maritime "choke points," such as the Malacca Strait, through which much of China's trade passes.

The Indonesian president's statements yesterday came in response to a formal letter from the Australian prime minister, personally delivered to Jakarta last Saturday by former army chief Lieutenant-General Peter Leahy. The correspondence between Abbott and Yudhoyono have not been publicly released. At last night's televised media conference from the presidential palace, Yudhoyono refused to specify whether Abbott had apologised for the spying.

"The Australian PM has agreed to, and is supportive of, my proposal to reorganise our bilateral cooperation, including intelligence exchanges, by drafting a clear and just protocol and code of conduct," the president said. "Only after that [will] bilateral cooperation, which evidently benefit the two of us, resume. [These] include military and police cooperation."

Under pressure from nationalist elements within the Indonesian elite, and facing public hostility to the extensive Australian eavesdropping, Yudhoyono issued a call for calm. "The government will responsibly and seriously deal with this, but we need to stay rational

and not become reckless,” the president said. “The Australian PM has made a commitment that Australia will not do anything in the future that will harm or upset Indonesia. That is a very important point.”

According to a poll published by *Kompas*, Indonesia’s biggest selling national daily, of people in 12 cities across the archipelago, 89 percent supported Australia being given a “harsh warning,” while 39 percent wanted further cuts to diplomatic ties.

Yudhoyono remained cautious about finalising a deal with Canberra. “After the two parties reach a ‘mutual understanding’ and a ‘mutual agreement’, I do hope that this can be followed with a comprehensive discussion on the establishment of the protocol and code of ethics,” he said. “Nevertheless, there are still some things, in my opinion, a few things that need clarification by Australia.”

The Indonesian president said he would personally check the draft protocol and code to ensure they fulfilled Indonesia’s interests. “I hope that ... the position and response from Indonesia will also get a constructive response from the Australian prime minister and the government he leads.”

Yudhoyono set no timeline for the negotiations, though his foreign affairs adviser later said that the talks could take one or two months. A presidential spokesman said that Indonesia’s ambassador to Australia, who was withdrawn last week, would remain in Jakarta until the negotiations were concluded.

When the spy scandal erupted last week, Jakarta suspended several critical programs, including military, intelligence and police cooperation, and joint operations in support of Canberra’s reactionary policy of stopping refugees arriving in Australia. National Police chief General Sutarman said on Monday that asylum seekers would now be free to sail to Australia. Trade Minister Gita Wirjawan raised the stakes yesterday by suggesting that Indonesia could look elsewhere for live cattle, beef, wheat and other food imports.

Like other governments throughout the region, the Yudhoyono administration has sought to balance between Washington’s military might and Beijing’s growing economic clout. China is Indonesia’s second largest trading partner, with two-way trade valued at \$66 billion, compared to \$15 billion with Australia. Online defence journal *Jane’s Defence Weekly* reported

yesterday that China has offered to build a network of coastal radars for Indonesia along some of China’s vital shipping routes, including sites in Lombok, the Sunda Strait, western Borneo and the southwest coast of Sulawesi.

Yesterday, as Yudhoyono was preparing his response to Abbott’s letter, the Australian government underlined its commitment to the US by echoing Washington’s belligerent response to China’s declaration of an air defence identification zone in the East China Sea. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop called in China’s ambassador to express concerns at Beijing’s announcement, describing it as “unhelpful in light of current regional tensions.”

These developments underscore the rising regional tensions that lie at the heart of the Indonesian standoff over Australian-US spying. The Indonesian ruling elites are deeply concerned that their interests will be trampled on as the US ramps up its military and intelligence build-up against China.



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