



**MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
STEPHEN SMITH, MP**

Transcript: Interview with Linda Mottram, Radio Australia, ABC

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TOPIC: Australia-Indonesia relationship

LINDA MOTTRAM: It seems the conclusion is being made generally that the Indonesia Australia relationship has finally matured. Is that best indicated by the decision to institute annual Leaders' meetings and the Defence and Foreign Ministers' meetings and the Prime Minister's comment that that's much like what the Australians do with the US?

STEPHEN SMITH: Well those trappings show a very strong relationship. I think there are a number of fundamental points. Firstly we have seen with the President's visit the emergence of a democratic Indonesia.

We have a President who's been directly elected on two occasions. And he and his Ministers including my two counterparts, Hassan Wirajuda firstly and Marty Natelegawa, are working very hard to institutionalise the trappings of democracy.

And, so I think for the first time Australians have seen a reflection of the modern Indonesia. Secondly, in the course of the last couple of days we've had conversations which have ranged across capital punishment and the Bali Nine, the Balibo Five, people smuggling, and a range of other things which in the past if they'd been discussed or been made public would have rocked the relationship.

Now they are issues that we manage and they are treated very much as business as usual. I think the third fundamental thing we are seeing is the emergence of Indonesia as an international influence.

Yes, Indonesia has been a regional influence in South East Asia and ASEAN, but we are now seeing Indonesia emerge globally and Australia and Indonesia working together in the G20 is a reflection of that.

All of these things, I think, have come together and been crystallised in a most successful visit by the Indonesian President.

The President himself in his speech to the Parliament yesterday, talked about continuing ill-informed stereotypes on both sides. And most Indonesians in Australia seem to agree that that is actually a core issue.

LINDA MOTTRAM: How do you deal with that?



STEPHEN SMITH: Well I think this is an area where we do need to try and make some progress. Foreign Minister Natelegawa and I, when we had our formal meeting earlier in the week agreed that we would do a comprehensive review of all of the people to people aspects of the relationship and they are considerable: cultural; language; educational; some sporting.

But there was a lot of commentary in the run up to the visit. Some of it I agreed with, some of it I disagreed with, but one aspect that I did believe was right was that we've got a very good relationship, nation to nation.

A very good relationship Prime Minister to President, Minister to Minister and officials to officials. We know each other, we understand each other. It's that maturity that you referred to earlier.

But there's a lag. The Australian people don't fully appreciate the modern Indonesia and the Indonesian people don't fully appreciate the modern Australia, and that's where I think we do need to do some work.

It'll come in time but there's no doubt that the appreciation of people to people is lagging behind the appreciation of Government to Government.

LINDA MOTTRAM: SBY himself said, this is a relationship that holds a lot of good for us if we manage it well, but cautions that that can easily be lost.

STEPHEN SMITH: I think that the only danger to a relationship where we have it now is either surprise, where something occurs which surprises us and knocks us off our balance, or – and I think this is much more likely – complacency.

We're constantly looking at more things that we can do. I know in terms of focus or media publicity or scrutiny there's a lot of scrutiny on what are regarded as current issues or perceived as difficult issues.

Whether that's the Balibo Five, the Bali Nine, Australians convicted in Indonesia of drug offences and the like. We manage these things and deal with them and that's part of the maturity.

But we're constantly looking for more things that we can do. How can we take it forward? And part of the taking forward has been reflected by the trappings of the relationship that you referred to earlier.

We now have those annual Leaders' meeting. We'll have the Foreign Ministers' and Defence Ministers' and Trade Ministers' meetings on that same regular basis.

That does reflect the sort of maturity that we find in other longstanding relationships, whether it's New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States or indeed Japan, where we also find similar reflections of a comprehensive bilateral relationship.



LINDA MOTTRAM: On those difficult issues that you've mentioned. To what extent do you feel that the Australian public have come along with you on the position that, look we can now have a mature discussion even about the hard stuff.

Because I mean the reality is that when SBY was speaking in the Parliament yesterday, there were West Papuan activists out the front making a range of demands that we're very familiar with, at the same time as the Indonesian President was saying, well Papua is, you know, a serious issue for us, and putting it out there as an issue of Indonesian nationalism.

I mean there are disjoints there, aren't there?

STEPHEN SMITH: There will always be differing views, whether it's different views expressed by individual Australians or individual Indonesians, on West Papua.

One of the trappings of the relationship which has helped set up the modern relationship has been the signing of the Lombok Treaty. Hassan Wirajuda and I brought it into existence in Perth a couple of years ago.

That respects the territorial integrity of Indonesia including over Papua and West Papua. That gave Indonesia a lot of comfort but at the same time what we saw the President do and his Government do, was to say, we can make improvements in Papua and West Papua.

We can have sensible autonomy for various decision-making and we can look to improvements in economic and social conditions, including the way in which people are treated so far as their right to express a view is concerned.

So we think that Indonesia has made progress on that front. But part of the strength now of Indonesia is that Indonesia has become and is becoming a diverse, secular country.

There is freedom of media and political expression. They have a robust Parliament. You know, sometimes we see scenes from the Indonesian Parliament which makes our Parliament look quite demure.

So they are a robust society as we are a robust society. And we as a Government, as a Parliament, don't try and suppress the expression of individual views.

On the contrary, we encourage it as part of our system and you are seeing that reflected in the modern Indonesia as well.

LINDA MOTTRAM: Still Indonesia has some way to go, on for example its military is not yet entirely reformed, and in West Papua of course we've seen allegations of human rights abuses over a considerable period.

What are you saying to the Indonesians about that and what are they saying to you about that?

STEPHEN SMITH: You've made a very good point with which I agree with and also Indonesia agrees with, which is no one is claiming victory at this point in time.



It's a work in progress. We think substantial improvement has been made, as we think substantial improvement has been made on the human rights front.

But just as we do with other countries, when we see human rights issues, we make these points to Indonesia.

I think the good thing is that whether it's been Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda or Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa they are both committed, as Foreign Ministers, and reflecting the views of the President, to not just institutionalising the trappings of democracy, but also seeking to institutionalise things that you and I would regard as individual civil liberties or freedoms.

So, whilst we are not saying that the current circumstances are perfect and neither is Indonesia, we do think that progress is being made. And we certainly think that with the President and his Ministers there is a commitment on that front.

LINDA MOTTRAM: And on the Australian headline issue of people smuggling. We've seen an agreement to a new framework. We don't have all those details in public but - and we've certainly seen the Indonesian President come to the party, as it were, in terms of trying to satisfy Australian demands.

But it's not a headline issue in Indonesia, is it?

STEPHEN SMITH: Can I say it's not an Australian demand. Indonesia and Australia both understand that the only way we can deal with large scale people movement is by working together.

Not just bilaterally but regionally. That's why Australia and Indonesia co-sponsored the establishment of the Bali Process, which is our regional institution of some 40 countries and regional and international institutions to try and deal with these issues. That's the first point.

Secondly, the agreement that we have struck, and I have made the point publicly, people should not expect that this agreement will be made public, because it goes very much to operational matters about prevention and disruption, the sorts of things which would only advantage people smugglers if it became public.

But it is enhanced co-operation. Doing more and better things to try and deal with the problem.

But that's also done under the framework of the Bali Process and the framework of the Lombok Treaty. And the President and Marty Natalegawa have made this point.

We have to address this problem with source countries like Sri Lanka, the Afghanistan/Pakistan border area and in the past, Iraq and Iran.



We have to deal with transit countries whether it's Indonesia or Malaysia for example. And we have to deal with destination countries and in that case it's Australia but it's also New Zealand and other countries.

It's a very difficult issue. Now I think there's another point which needs to be made, which is neither Australia nor Indonesia regard the new framework document that we have agreed between ourselves as in any way being a silver bullet or a magic solution.

This will still be a very difficult issue for Australia and Indonesia and other countries in our region to deal with and grapple with for the foreseeable future.

LINDA MOTTRAM: So, in terms of growing the relationship and dealing with that issue of the more robust people to people, you know, really embedded people to people relationships and a better understanding of each other's peoples.

I mean how long does that process take? I mean Australia has been talking for years about becoming more Asia focused, learning more Asian languages and yet that's rarely been subject to the whims of politics in Australia to some extent.

STEPHEN SMITH: Well I think we have become more focused on our own region, on the Asia Pacific. I think language is an important part, which is why we, when we came into office committed ourselves to the substantial language training program in our schools, in Asian languages, including Indonesian.

But one of our difficulties of course is we don't have enough so-called Indonesianists, you know the cadre of Indonesianists. And so that takes time.

We also have a shortage of Indonesian language teachers and one of the things we are doing is looking at a program where we can bring Indonesians to actually engage in the language teaching.

I think we also need more collaboration, for example, between our academic institutions. That would be a good thing. These things always take time.

But I think when people look back at this visit that they'll see this as quite an historic visit. The first time a President from Indonesia addressed the joint sitting of our Parliament.

Where all those strands came together the maturing of a relationship, and the emergence of Indonesia internationally, as an international influence.

Our capacity to manage difficult issues together without having those issues rock the relationship or destabilise it. All of these coming together at the same time as we saw, really for the first occasion, the emergence of the modern, democratic Indonesia.

It always takes time to consolidate these things and for individual peoples to get an appreciation of it. Governments and officials, and even journalists have an appreciation of it because they are exposed to it on a regular basis.



We need to build the cultural and the people to people exchanges and links so that our peoples have more regular exposure to it and gain a better appreciation of it.

LINDA MOTTRAM: Thanks for your time, Stephen.

STEPHEN SMITH: Thank you.